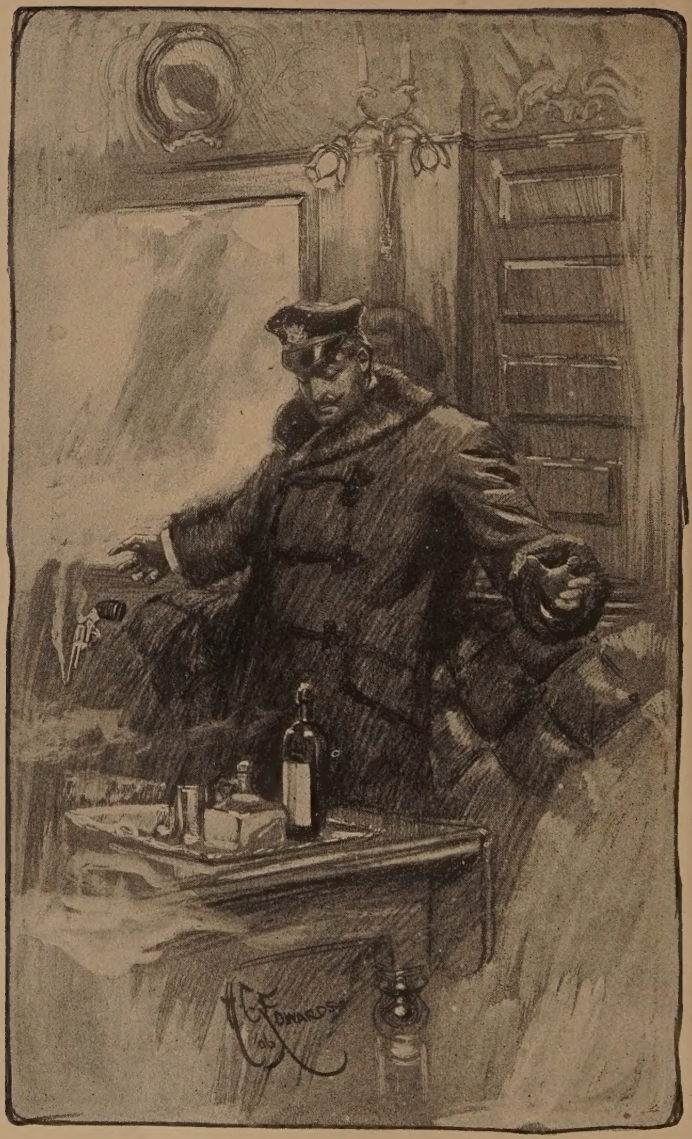
THE PRIVATE WAR

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

AUTHOR OF
THE BRASS BOWL

Mrs. J. H. Probasco
Seal Rock, Oregon
1960

THE PRIVATE WAR



"I saw Von Holzborn standing . . . supported . . . against the partition behind the table."

THE PRIVATE WAR

Being the Truth about Gordon Traill
His Personal Statement

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

Author of
"THE BLACK BAG," "THE BRASS BOWL," etc.

With Four Illustrations
By H. C. EDWARDS

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

"THE DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE"

I HAVE chosen to place them here, at the head of the story, since they are in a way responsible for it, its excuse, its *raison d'être*. Had they not been collected, clipped, as they were, one by one from the back files of newspapers, in part by Mr. Sevrance and in part by myself, after long and patient searchings in our respective fields; had they not been assembled thus to lend their authority to the truth of Mr. Traill's remarkable statement, I should have hesitated long ere undertaking this my task of editing, if, indeed, I could have secured my own consent to the lending of my name to a story so variously extraordinary.

As it is, they—"the documents in the case"—seem somehow to force me to such action. Reading them, one is impressed that by rights the world should know the truth, however tardily it may be presented; should be enabled, figuratively, to sit at ease in the pit and see —at last!—the rising of that curtain of blank mystery which for so long had hidden from us the causes which brought about that moving succession of strange events,

in themselves seemingly so meaningless, which at the time of their publication furnished such ample reason for more than one nine days' wonderment.

They are, unfortunately, few—far too few; a mere handful of old clippings. One who does not know, who himself has not been privileged to peep behind the drop, can speculate but vaguely concerning them, perhaps recalling those hours of fruitless conjecture which they demanded of him about the time of their appearance, when not he alone, but all the world besides, and four—no, five world powers were all by the ears, as the saying is, to guess the secret of their enigmatic continuity, to divine the truth that has, to this day, lain hidden at the bottom of a fathomless well of mystery.

To me, however, they tell a moving and coherent story. As I thumb them over, pondering which may be the fittest, first to offer to your consideration, my eye caught and held now and again by a chance word, by a name or a phrase, I seem to see, even as Traill saw them in the flesh, the living actors in this drama.

I see her ladyship, Julia—Miss Leigh that our Richmond remembers with a sigh for the loss of her—with her dainty head held high and proudly, and her eyes that were so calm and clear and sweet, as Gordon Traill tells us: she whose heart was a mystery more entrancing, a riddle far less readable than aught in the odd chain of circumstance that follows. "Heart's Desire" Traill loved to call her; and in some way as such she figures to me, somehow by that term incarnated, bodied forth to the imagination between the lines of dingy, blurred type; dear and lovable girl that she was, for all her wifehood and her widowed youth.

As clearly I see the Herr Captain, Kurd von Holzborn; dark and set of jaw, with his masklike, impassive face and his deep-set, opaque eyes that could be steady enough when he chose, but had their telltale trick of the quick, the lightning-quick, sideways glance. A big man and strong alike in his body and his passions; good to look upon and fascinating with his magnetic charm of manner: big and strong and ruthless—black as midnight at the heart of him.

And I see Monsieur de Netze, the astute and furtive—cool, debonair, fertile of expedient; with his lofty, pallid forehead and his Vandyke beard; distinguished of appearance and bearing; lover of the devious and the underhand: that arch plotter, that admirable and amiable conspirator, true to one thing only—the loyalty he held to his master, his most gracious majesty, the Czar of all the Russias.

There are others, many others, passing before me in phantasmal review as I con this little packet of clippings. There is Callahan, the engineer, a man, were he sober or fuddled; Grady, the gentleman's gentleman, the resourceful and the fearless; Sevrance, the Englishman, whom Traill loved as a brother, and who was worthy, true as tried steel, and a gallant gentleman; Captain Keen, with his false tongue and wavering loyalty; and others, strange to imagine for the most part —odd-seeming faces of a foreign cast to our Anglo-Saxon eyes, brutal faces and kindly, evil and honest—a ghostly rabble, with glaring eyeballs in hollow sockets, features drawn and hair matted, as becomes men who slumber in the ooze of the ocean's bed.

But, clearest of them all, I see Traill himself—Gor-

don Traill, of New York, U. S. A., if you please; gallant and audacious, considerate and determined, facing Fate and Chance with his laugh and that upward fling of his head; a man frail like the rest of us, but fine-grained as the best of us, bearing in his breast a faithful, dauntless heart. Out of the throng he bulks big and humanly; customarily with his hat on the back of his head, feet apart, hands in his pockets, hair tousled, brows thoughtful enough, but with his ready laugh lurking in the corners of his mouth, and with eyes merry save when he faces his Heart's Desire.

. . . . . .

As you say, this is wandering far from "the documents in the case." Here they are, then—I give them you as the world had them, with neither comment nor explanation:

I

Gordon Traill has left us, following his habit of fleeing the city when it gets too hot to hold him. Every season a certain number of dowagers, mothers of promising buds, camp on the trail of the Traill millions; and then "Gaudy" finds it convenient to keep a pressing engagement to kill something, somewhere. Some time last week he folded his tent and silently stole away; rumor has it that he has sought the seclusion of the Maine woods.—"*Society gossip,*" *in a scurrilous New York weekly, dated January 15th.*

II

The engagement of Lady Herbert, widow of Sir Henry Herbert, K.C.S.I., is rumored. Official confir-

mation is lacking, but it is stated upon good authority that the prospective bridegroom is a young *attaché* of the German embassy at the Court of St. James.

Lady Herbert was the beautiful Miss Julia Leigh, of Richmond, Va., whose father, General Thorpe Leigh, acquired an immense fortune through operations in the West Virginia oil fields. Sir Henry Herbert died suddenly in 1902.—*Cable dispatch from London, New York Herald, January 11th.*

III

BARMOUTH, *Jan. 29th.*—Much excitement prevails here as the result of a peculiar affair in the ship-building district of this city. At an early hour this morning a number of armed ruffians forced an entrance to the shipyards of Rogers & Greer, overpowered the watchmen, and successfully launched and made off with a large and valuable steam yacht, which had been on the ways, in the final stages of construction and fitting out. —*London Daily Chronicle.*

IV

LONDON, *Jan. 30th.*—Reports from Harwich, Essex, state that the English torpedo-boat destroyer, H. M. S. *Asp*, entered that port late last night in a crippled condition, having apparently suffered severely in a sea fight. Her commander and crew were uncommunicative; a report, however, has been made to the Admiralty, which withholds all details. It is rumored that the *Asp* was attacked by a Russian battle ship of the first class, and, despite official denials of the most

positive nature, great crowds are clamoring indignantly in front of the Admiralty Office.—*Cable dispatch to The Sun, New York.*

V

HULL, *Jan. 30th.*—The Hull fishermen, who recently figured so conspicuously in the public eye as victims of the Russian Baltic squadron, were to-day thrown into a state of wild excitement by rumors of a naval engagement on the Dogger Bank in the North Sea. Captain Isaac Bull, of the steam trawler *Bullfinch*, and Captain J. M. Eaves, of the *Enterprise*, are responsible for the rumor, which became public property upon the unexpected return of the trawlers to Hull this morning. They state that, at a late hour yesterday evening, the weather being muggy and foggy, the crews of both vessels, which were fishing near each other, became aware of heavy firing in a northeasterly direction. Fearful of a repetition of the Baltic squadron outrage, the anchors were hastily weighed, and the trawlers prepared for flight. In the meantime the fog lifted slightly, disclosing a battle ship of the first class at a distance of some five miles, with every gun in action. According to the statements of some witnesses, the battle ship flew the Japanese flag. The light was so murky that no other ship was seen by the trawlers, and the fog immediately closed in again. The trawlers at once shaped for Hull, and state that the firing continued for about an hour, terminating in a tremendous explosion. No further details are obtainable.—*London Daily Telegraph.*

VI

LONDON, *Jan. 31st.*—Popular indignation is responsible for an attempt to connect the appearance of a Japanese battle ship, in the North Sea, as reported by the Hull trawlers, with the crippled condition of H. M. S. *Asp*, now at Harwich. The Admiralty, however, has explicitly stated that the injuries to the *Asp* were caused by an explosion of ammunition during target practice, and the story of the Hull fishermen is generally discredited in official circles, the presence of a Japanese warship in European waters being regarded as improbable.—*Cable dispatch to The New York Herald.*

VII

LONDON, *Feb. 1st.*—In connection with the *Asp* incident, as previously reported, it is stated that the first-class battle ship *Glenavo* and the protected cruiser *Planet* left Sheerness hurriedly at midnight last night, sailing with sealed orders.—*Ibid.*

VIII

BERLIN, *Feb. 10th.*—Despite official contradiction from a high quarter, the report has leaked out and is generally credited, to the effect that the German torpedo-boat destroyer *Vistula* is missing. The *Vistula* left Wilhelmshaven with sealed orders on January 26th, since when she has not been heard from.—*Ibid.*

IX

Alarmed by his continued absence, the family and friends of Mr. Anthony Sevrance, a barrister, and one

of the well-known Sevrance family of Sussex, have advertised for news concerning him. Mr. Sevrance left his rooms in Lord's Chambers on the morning of Sunday, January 18th, in company with his valet, a person by the name of Grady, and a young man of unknown identity, who had been his guest for a day or two; none of the party has since been seen or heard from. Mr. Sevrance was a gentleman of means, well known to a large circle of acquaintances, and a member of four prominent clubs. Foul play is apprehended by his friends, who, nevertheless, assert that he had not an enemy in the world. The advertisement, giving details of his personal appearance, and with a description of the man Grady, appears in another column.—*London Evening Mail.**

X

WILHELMSHAVEN, *Feb. 17th.*—The protected cruiser *Danzig* and the destroyer *Ems*, both attached to the North Sea squadron of the German navy, sailed from this port yesterday under sealed orders. It is conjectured that they are commissioned with the investigation of the loss of the destroyer *Vistula*, which has not been heard from since January 26th.—*Associated Press cable to various American newspapers.*

XI

LONDON, *Feb. 15th.*—The unaccountable disappearance of Captain Kurd von Holzborn, *attaché* of the German embassy at the Court of St. James, is re-

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*Mr. Sevrance neglected to date this clipping.—EDITOR.

sponsible for rumors of his suicide. Captain von Holzborn left his apartments on the seventeenth of January, and has not since been heard from. It is known that he was financially embarrassed at the time of his disappearance.—*Cable dispatch, New York Press.*

XII

LONDON, *Feb. 21st.*—Much curiosity has been expressed here in connection with the latest vagary of the beautiful Lady Herbert, who was formerly Miss Julia Leigh, of Richmond, Va., and whose marriage to the late Sir Henry Herbert, K.C.S.I., in 1900, was an event of the New York social season. Sir Henry died in 1902, without issue, leaving his Lincolnshire estates —Saltacres—to his widow, he being the last of his line. Since she discarded mourning, Lady Herbert has been a prominent figure in the London social swim, her great wealth enabling her to indulge her whims to the full of her fancy.

It is, however, only just to say that none of her pranks has resulted harmfully, and that no iota of scandal clings about the dainty skirts of the little American lady. But so odd, unprecedented, and *outré* have been many of her freaks, that society has stood aghast and breathless, able only to wonder what she would choose to do next. Her most grave breaches of Mrs. Grundy's code, however, are attributable to nothing more serious than the effervescent spirits of a young and mischief-loving girl; for Lady Herbert is little more, having been married (against her wishes, it is whispered) at the age of eighteen. Hardly more than an awkward but promising *débutante* when Sir Henry brought her

to England as his wife, she has since developed into a most beautiful and brilliant woman.

Her latest extravagance is positively inexplicable, in that it consists of a total disappearance from the face of the known earth—so far, at least, as her friends are concerned. Shortly after the recent announcement of her engagement to the dashing young German *attaché*, Captain Kurd von Holzborn, she chose to vanish completely, leaving not a word of explanation. Inquiries have been made at her country estate and of her solicitors, but both servants and lawyers remain mute; if they know anything, they won't tell it.

The fact that her ladyship's private yacht, the *Myosotis*, was recently put into commission and sailed from Portsmouth for parts unknown, coincidently with the disappearance of its owner, on January 17th, seems significant, when coupled with the simultaneous vanishing of the gallant German captain. The worldly-wise are shaking their heads knowingly, and whispering that Lady Herbert had made up her mind to dispense with the pomp and ceremony of a "society wedding": in plain English, she is supposed to have eloped with her fascinating *fiancé*, and is probably now spending a honeymoon on the yacht, perhaps in the Mediterranean.

But nobody really knows; and nobody who is acquainted with Lady Herbert, however personally convinced he might feel of the truth of this hypothesis, would venture to back his opinion with any considerable sum of money. Her ladyship's mind is an uncertain quantity, you know.—*London correspondence published in the scurrilous New York weekly first quoted.*

. . . . . .

That is not all, but I think it is enough. There are other clippings—twenty-odd more of them—but their interest is but passing; they tell us nothing new. Some are mere duplicates of those which I have quoted—duplicates in essence, that is.

Others, again, are of later dates than the last above, and furnish only a continuation or, rather, a confirmation of their intelligence. I read in one, dated March 30th, that nothing has been heard of Mr. Anthony Sevrance, well-known barrister, "who disappeared"—and so forth.

From another I learn that the Commander von Something-or-other has been ordered from Kiel to the Court of St. James, to replace Captain Kurd von Holzborn, absent without leave. This is some three months after the event.

Again we hear that it is believed that Lady Herbert and her yacht, the *Myosotis*, shared in the fate that overtook the hapless *Vistula* in the North Sea. This is under the date of April 18th, up to which time the *Myosotis* had not been reported. But fishermen had brought into Lynn Regis the portion of the stern post of a lifeboat, which they had picked up far out at sea. The fragment showed three letters, presumably part of the name of the vessel to which the boat belonged. They were: "STU." Which is held fairly conclusive proof of the sinking of the *Vistula*.

The matter of the stolen yacht was dropped by its owners, Messrs. Rogers & Greer, shipwrights of Barmouth. The search instituted for the vessel and its crew of ruffians was reported fruitless. The world followed the example of the worthy builders and ceased to

concern itself with the matter; in a fortnight it was become ancient history.

As for the Japanese battle ship, the wags made merry over the visions of the hysterical Hull trawlers for a week or so—who, as one says, "went down to the sea in ships to catch haddocks and caught hallucinations." And then that subject, too, lost flavor for the public palate. The trawlers lapsed into sullen silence, as befits true men whose word is doubted without sufficient cause.

But last of all the little stack of clippings comes one from the same source as the first—and only other—concerning Mr. Traill.

It is now three months since Mr. Traill has vanished from the haunts of men—which is to say, has left New York. He has sent home no word. His relatives, with their minds' eyes on the Traill income, are anxious and perturbed on his account. His lawyers profess ignorance of his whereabouts, though they are obviously not distressed. He is in danger of being forgotten of the world—that part of the world, that is, which lies within the limits of Manhattan Island. So the scandal-mongering sheet rushes valiantly to the rescue, sounding his name for the last time in many a day.

A mere line, this:

Where, oh, where, is Gordon Traill, Esquire—our "Gaudy" Traill?

But the query has lain long enough unanswered; doubtless even its author has forgotten the penning of it. Yet I fancy that even he will take an interest in the reply, belated though it comes.

CHAPTER I

A PINNACLE OF ROMANCE

"I TELL you, Gordon, faint heart ne'er will win fair Julia. My dear fellow, you are delinquent in your duty. And why? For the life of me, I cannot determine. Surely, if ever a prize was worth the winning, it is this same Lady Herbert. And you, who have, as you tell me, loved her from the days when you played together as boy and girl—*you* linger idly in New York, letting the precious minutes slip by, permitting the prize you covet to slip through your nerveless fingers!

"I am all out of patience with you. What do you fear? I tell you the girl at heart is still a girl. Sir Henry—oh, I can see him clearly; I knew the man like a book. Count me blind and witless if it is not true that he was more father than husband: stolid, kind, courteous—an English gentleman. His affection for the girl was paternal, purely. I doubt if even her sweet beauty ever stirred his withered heart other than with its appeal for protection. But he is now a negligible factor. There are living men, men of flesh and blood, who are likewise alive to her loveliness—and, frankly, I am not the least of them.

"So I counsel you to bestir yourself. Time and a woman's heart wait for no man. She is young and all for love. She dreams of love—I'll swear she does—I,

who have looked in her eyes traitorously to see if she gave me her lightest thought. She is vibrant with her new-found freedom and, womanlike, only too eager to put her pretty neck in the yoke of another master. If not you—then another.

"Who? Why not myself, for one? Oh, I'm all for candor. If you show yourself disposed to let slip the chance, I'll throw our friendship to the winds, dear boy, and go in for my own hand. There you have it.

"And there are others unbound by the claims of friendship. Have you heard the rumors that are afloat to the effect that she is engaged to the German naval *attaché?* Both her ladyship and Captain Kurd von Holzborn (that's his name) are busy denying the fact to-day. The chances are, then, that it is truth, and that the news will be published, the engagement announced, within the next fortnight. So you see what your timid dalliance has meant for you—or what it may mean. You'd best take ship at once and make up for lost time, regain lost ground. . . ."

I did not care to read farther. Sevrance's letter slipped from my fingers and fluttered to the floor, while I stared out of the window.

It snowed gustily; in the park opposite, the trees were like shivering ghosts, swaying and flopping in gray shrouds of whirling flakes.

Later I remembered them; but at the moment I saw nothing but my Heart's Desire, separated from me by many leagues of cold and storm-swept ocean: Julia Leigh—as I remembered her—making in her loneliness for the protection of another's arms!

The thought was intolerable. I chose my course, in the few moments that I stood there gazing abstractedly out at the dismal wilderness of Central Park, bleak and desolate. When I stooped and picked up the letter, feeling myself faintly warmed by gratitude for Sevrance's kindliness, it was all settled; I was for England—for the first time in many years. My heart was young and hot within me, and I pictured myself very chivalrously and gallantly winning my love back to me. As for the German, there was to be the devil to pay with him, had he indeed forestalled my suit.

But, at the time, I had not the pleasure of Kurd von Holzborn's acquaintance. I figured him to myself as the self-sufficient boor in uniform, with the ferocious Kaiser Wilhelm mustaches: the type with which I had been familiar enough in my student days at Munich—a swaggering, intolerant, insolent Prussian naval officer. Nor could I easily imagine Julia giving him a second thought.

As I say, however, I did not know the captain—then.

I turned, calling Timmins. His face lengthened tremendously when he got his orders; it was little to his taste, to be left behind to lie on my behalf. But I was determined that if I were foredoomed to failure, the world should not guess my folly and have the satisfaction of sneering over it.

Timmins was instructed, then, to pack my trunks and procure me passage on the first steamer leaving New York. After my departure, his duty was to consist in staying in my apartments and informing all inquirers that Mr. Traill was gone moose hunting in

the Maine woods. I understand that he has performed his duties faithfully.

There were things to be attended to, and I had a brisk time of it for a day; the cab fares, I remember, were considerable; but twenty-four hours sufficed and gained me my end—I was able to sail on the following morning.

It was a day hard, brilliant, and cold like a diamond, such as New York knows after a storm. I watched the city out of sight, saw it lose itself below the empurpled rim of the waste of waters, calculating the while upon an early return—being unendowed with the spirit of prophecy.

Yet I was impatient enough. Heaven knows why I had been content to stay apart from her for so long a time. But, when I think of it, content is not the word; I was anything but that; I believe I had longed for her every minute of the endless days. The desire of her had been the undercurrent of my life for so long that I had come to regard it in the light of a familiar; I had lapsed into a species of lethargy, into a state of quiet assurance that in the end all would be well did I not hurry Julia unduly.

And, indeed, the interval I had allowed her was but decent—a scant two years of widowhood; but in that time I had discovered the truth that man can live in the consciousness of his love as well as for it.

Sevrance's letter with its startling intelligence had been necessary to stir me to action. Well it had accomplished that purpose. It had been like a draught upon the embers of my love; and now, behold, there was a flame in my breast and a consuming fire.

The steamer was all too slow for me; the five and a half days were so many ages. I hurried down the gangplank, in the end, almost before it was made fast to the pier. I was preoccupied, ever looking ahead, into the future—like a man possessed of a demon. Indeed, I retain but the vaguest of recollections of that disembarkation, of my cab ride through the grimy streets of Liverpool, of my taking passage on the London and Northwestern.

Even when in my otherwise empty compartment, I was whirled on Londonward wrapt in dreams. I only wakened when we drew in at the Euston Square Station, and then only for a moment.

Incontinently I was plunged into an odd adventure; and in a way I seemed to have been prepared for it. My state of mind was appropriate; I was ready for anything. A mad dash across an ocean and an island in the pursuit of a dream had fitted me to step promptly into the coil of mediæval deviltry wherein I was presently to find myself entangled.

At the time, you must know that I was to all intents and purposes a stranger in a strange land; my knowledge of the geography of London was of the slenderest! I had not seen the city since my sixteenth year. Time had blended the impressions of that visit into a dismal, dingy memory of wet and shining pavements, of hollow, clapping hoofs, and of long stretches of drab dwellings, one as like to its fellow as peas.

So, properly, I needed the services of a guide—though if it is objected that a keeper would have been more useful, I shan't contend the point.

Moreover, I returned to find the town fog-bound.

I recall a dim speculation as to what caused the smokiness in the interior of the terminal, where the escaping steam rasped shrilly and the crowds jostled and the electric arcs were ringed with opalescent but dirty halos. It was not until I gained the street that I comprehended the fact of the fog.

I handed my baggage checks to a runner for the Carleton and immediately stepped out into the street and the fog—stepped, in a way, from the crude realities of to-day into a mystical midregion of Romance: from the twentieth to the eighteenth century, with as much ease and expedition as young Rudolf Rassendyl himself.

This was at night, you understand. I believe the hour was verging toward ten. The swinging doors of the terminal slapped together. I slipped on a wet and slimy step and lurched forward into the fog's dank embrace. In that instant I was lost.

When I turned the terminal was vanished—swallowed up in the omnivorous maw of that cursed mist; I was instantly undetermined as to whether or no I had turned squarely about. I was dazed, if the truth is to be told, and swung slowly around on my heel, glaring into an almost impenetrable obscurity.

Here and there lights glowed feebly roseate, seemingly at considerable distances; what they stood for was a riddle. I made for one, struggling with a ridiculous desire to stretch out my arms and thrust the fog behind with the palms of my hands—much as one swims. On the way I blundered into the arms of an individual who first clasped me ardently to his bosom, then thrust me aside with a muttered oath—or an apol-

ogy. It was difficult to determine which. I did not greatly care.

Presently I was embracing a lamp-post, and, reasoning logically that a curb must be near at hand, I put out a tentative foot and verified this sage surmise. Then casting adrift, I began to follow the curb, with the comfortable assurance that it would eventually lead me somewhere. In the gloom men passed me like shadows—somewhat as I have seen a steamer loom hugely from a fog on the Newfoundland Banks and slip silently on into the unknown.

But only the city's roar was about me, and that subdued, half choked, like myself, by the coils of mist. I listened eagerly enough for some guiding noise, but after a minute or two it was as if the sounds were all around me, blurred into an incoherent whole, a component part of the fog itself.

And after a bit I lost my guiding curb and was utterly at sea. Presently, however, I stumbled smack into the rear wheels of a *coupé,* and incontinently gave heartfelt thanks. A London fog is an interesting thing; it teems with an infinity of possibilities; but, even to the fascinated stranger, sufficient unto one day is a sample thereof. For my part I was heartily sick of it all, and desired nothing better than my bedroom at the Carleton.

Pawing the wheels and sides of the vehicle—for I was determined not to get out of touch with it under any circumstances—I made my way around to the shafts and there, looking up, beheld in the dim illumination furnished by a lamp toward which I had evidently been progressing, but which seemed to poke itself sud-

denly out of the obscurity—I beheld, I say, on a level with my eyes, a pair of shoes and a knee-high length of frayed trousers, conceivably a section of the driver.

Lifting up my voice I hailed him loudly, but got no answer. A fugitive fear assailed me that it was all an hallucination—that there was really nothing there but the fantastic vision of legs and feet—no man at all above them; I had shouted stridently, but the fellow made no move.

But by that time I was determined; I had found a cab, an isle of safety, a tower of refuge. I refused to be put off, and, reaching up, grabbed the legs and pulled at them; which having no effect, I resorted to violent pinchings. And that served the turn.

At once grumbled protests became audible. I comprehended that the fellow had been asleep, and that he resented the manner of his awakening. Considering sleep in the guise of an opiate, with power to mitigate the abiding horror of the fog, I did not find it in my heart to blame the man. His words, however, were unintelligible, being delivered into a stratum of atmosphere several feet above my head.

At length, however, a round, red countenance, resembling somewhat a drowsy harvest moon, was lowered jerkily toward me. Two sleep-blinded eyes blinked into mine, and a breath, foul with a stench of liquor, caused me to step back to a respectful distance.

"Wot?" said the driver surlily.

"Are you engaged?" I demanded.

His answer seemed to be in the negative.

"Can you take me to the Carleton?" I pursued tenaciously.

He nodded.

"The Carleton!" I shouted, hoping to drill my desired destination into his head by sheer force of repetition.

He seemed to come to himself abruptly. His voice, husky and thick, was suddenly and surprisingly strong and distinct.

"Hi *said* yes!" he told me resentfully. "'Ow many toimes *'ave* Hi got to tell yer?" Then in a quieter, more respectful tone: "Climb in, gov'ner."

I obeyed meekly, sure that I had accomplished my end, seeing the white coverlet of the bed in near prospect—a grateful thought. Engaged by it, I closed the door upon myself and sank back upon cushions that had known the weight of many passengers, if their odor counted for aught. The air within was musty and fusty and strong, but I found it endurable. A case of any port in a storm, you know.

On the box there arose the sound of shifting feet and an incessant monotone of grumblings. I made out that the cabby was getting ready to move, yet the actual start seemed to be unnecessarily delayed. Finally, when my patience was about exhausted, the vehicle suddenly got into motion and proceeded sedately to crawl through the blackness of the night.

Trustful in my driver's knowledge of his city, and considering also that progress must of necessity be slow in order to avoid collisions, I settled down to endure the temporary imprisonment. We continued to crawl.

I had no notion as to the Carleton's place upon the map of London; it might have been within half a block or miles away, for all I could say; and I realized that

I was at the mercy of my guide, and must bide my time with what composure I had at my command.

And we crawled. To-day I could not recognize the horse that drew that superannuated vehicle were I to meet him face to face, but I am willing to wager recklessly that he was a mere worn-out rack of hide and bones. Throughout the whole adventure he showed but once the slightest evidence of speed; only once did he seem familiar with a trot, or even on speaking terms with a rapid walk.

Minutes dragged on into I know not how many tens; after some time I struck a match and examined the dial of my watch. It was twenty minutes after ten. Something later I resorted to the same device. In the interim I must have nodded—dozed for forty winks; for it did not seem such a very long time. Yet it was then a little past eleven; and still we progressed through the heart of London at a snail's pace. Having failed to attract the driver's attention by repeated knocks on the roof of the *coupé*, I thrust my head out of the door and yelled at him.

He had been asleep! He woke up, yawning and ill-tempered.

"The Carleton?" I demanded frantically.

As at a prearranged signal, all locomotion ceased.

"Har?" inquired the cabby, leering intelligently at me.

"The Carleton?" I shrieked.

"Hr-yah!" He gaped tremendously. Then he stood up on the box, swaying, the upper parts of him cloaked in fog.

After a time he concluded to sit down.

"The Carleton?" I iterated appealingly.

He started as if shot.

"Yessir," he said again, with that amazing quality of voice, penetrating as the rasping of a file. "Brought yer right to the door, guv'ner."

He picked up the reins and admonished the horse: "Giddap!" We moved again, delving into profundities of fog. I gave up hope with a sigh.

Yet, within one minute at the most, we paused again. I looked out, incredulity in my heart.

We had stopped at a curb; the arch of an illuminated awning, extending down across the sidewalk, confronted me. Beyond there was a glow of greater light, together with hushed strains of music from a skillfully directed string orchestra.

It seemed too good to be true; I could hardly grasp the reality of my good fortune. Nevertheless, this wore all the hall-marks of a great hotel; even the muddied length of red carpet beneath the awning but confirmed the hypothesis.

We had arrived! Personally, I harbored doubts as to the place being actually the Carleton; but that mattered little; it was a hotel—a place to rest my confused head and weary body. In a fever of impatience I jumped out and paid the man what he asked—two or three shillings—adding a handsome but totally undeserved gratuity; and dismissed the memory of that interminable journey from my mind—forever, I fondly anticipated.

As I strode eagerly up the strip of carpet, I was forced to step aside and give way to a party of three who came down the steps of the building arm in arm.

For an instant something queer in their manner puzzled me; and then I recognized that two were acting the rôles of Samaritans to the third, the fellow in the middle, who was repulsively intoxicated.

As they passed, making their way with some difficulty because of the dead weight of the central figure, I caught a glimpse of his face—not an unhandsome face, of a foreign, Slavic type, ghastly pale, wholly stupid, brutalized and made disgustingly sensual by excesses. It was gone in an instant; yet I felt myself shudder a bit—and I am not squeamish.

A moment later I was at the top of the stairs; and there a bitter disappointment awaited me, in the person of the most magnificently plush-upholstered lackey, with the stodgiest British calves, radiant in white stockings, that it has ever been my privilege to view.

He stepped suddenly from behind the door and barred the way with a majestic arm.

"'Oom," he inquired precisely, "do you wish to see?"

I paused, aghast, realizing the bitter truth.

"This is a private house?"

"Hit is," he returned without emotion.

I hesitated, stammering something about a mistake. A gleam of suspicion lightened the dull surface of his eyes. He shook his head, firmly compressing his lips. I turned and fled, conscious that his unfriendly glare remained concentrated upon the small of my back.

But on the sidewalk confusion became my portion. I had not the least notion as to my whereabouts. I pondered a return and a request for directions from that splendid, ancestral lackey; but the recollection of

that stolid stare affrighted me. I determined first to seek the cab, and, had it not moved—as seemed unlikely in view of the condition of the driver—to chance the luck with him a second time.

To make a mistake is human—to repeat it is a fool's part. *I* blundered egregiously.

As I had suspected, the cab had not stirred. I poked the cabby with my cane and again succeeded in rousing him.

"The Carleton!" I told him desperately. "Do you think you can take me to the Carleton?"

He touched his hat stiffly this time.

"The Carleton," he agreed with wistful patience. "Climb in, gov'ner."

What choice had I? I climbed in. It was either that or a night's wandering about the streets of an unknown city. I chose what I fancied the lesser evil.

I pulled open the door, and at the same moment the horse started forward. The movement was slight enough, in all conscience, and yet it was enough to make me stumble and to tangle up my feet. By the time I got them straightened out, the vehicle was converging toward the middle of the street. I caught hold of the side of the door and, with a spring, threw myself in.

Lunging in upon my knees, I thrust out both hands to save myself a nasty fall, expecting to land upon the cushions of the seats. To the contrary, my fingers encountered, on the one side, the warm flesh of a hand, on the other, a trousered leg; and, simultaneously, a man swore with vigor.

"You damned fool!" he cried. "Do you desire to bring the police about our ears?"

"I beg pardon—" I faltered, recovering, but pardonably amazed.

My voice apparently betrayed to the speaker his mistake. I heard him shut his teeth together with a sharp, unpleasant click, and before I could make another move a blinding glare of light was in my eyes.

I suppose I blinked like an owl; certainly I saw nothing beyond the bulls-eye of that pocket-size electric hand lamp. It was like gazing full-eyed at the sun itself, for a moment. And then, as abruptly, it was switched off, the interior of the *coupé* again wrapped in total darkness.

"Get up and sit down," said the voice—a rich and heavy voice, well modulated, its accents those of a man of cultivation, yet tinged faintly with a foreign intonation, as though the speaker used his English with knowledge, yet without great facility.

"I have no wish to intrude—" I began.

"Sit down!" said the man peremptorily.

"I fancied the carriage vacant——"

"Sit down and hold your tongue!"

"Who the devil—" I expostulated hotly.

A hand clapped itself across my mouth, so sharply as to cause a momentary sensation of pain, and as unceremoniously something cool and hard was pressed against my temple. The voice came again, charged with an inflexible resolution:

"Sit down, sir, and be quiet!"

I recognized the contact of cold steel against my skin and knew that my life was threatened with a revolver.

other. I believe he swore; but I gritted my teeth and tightened my grip.

He was a man of tremendous strength and infinite resource, however. No sooner had I touched him than he had turned on me with a snarl and thrown me off by a clever, upward twist of his arms. I was slammed back against the seat with a crash that rattled the windows of the *coupé*; and instantly I kicked out with all the ill-will in the world—kicked with all the strength that was in me.

I landed, feeling his flesh give beneath my boot heel, and heard him groan. Something thumped upon the floor. An instant, and we were at hand grips again. For a time we fought madly, striving each for the mastery, there in the pitch-black interior of that ramshackle cab.

I was gradually shifting my hold; in the end I got one hand firmly clinched about his throat, forcing his head back. I fancy that he was then belaboring me with his one free fist, but I cannot remember distinctly. At all events, each of us was straining to his utmost, when I heard the wheel of the vehicle grate against a curb.

By accident we had come into the circle of light cast by a dingy street lamp; by its feeble glow I got a momentary impression of my antagonist's features—a nightmarish impression of a thinly modeled face with prominent cheek bones, a white forehead, and a jaw hidden by a short, bristling beard. The eyes were—well, unpleasant.

That vision passed as the light faded when the lamp was left behind. The wheel continued to scrape the

curbing, and the speed—save the mark!—of the vehicle was sensibly slackening. I was fighting with a vengeance, exerting myself without stint, half maddened by the antagonism with a brute such as this man seemed to be.

Somehow—I can't say how—I pulled myself together and flung him from me. His shoulders crashed against the door. There was a snap, sharp and metallic, and it flew off its hinges, letting him out.

He fell heavily to the paving, but seemed to possess all the agility of a rubber ball. The man actually bounced up from the cobbles. He was on his feet in a trice, and, before I could reach the street, was off—gone into the fog.

I paused, at a loss, listening; in the strained interval I could distinctly catch the sound of light footsteps flying down the street.

"You've confidence!" I called after him, panting, as the sounds diminished and were swallowed up by the distance. "*I'd* not run the risk of breaking my head in this fog!"

Meanwhile, I found myself trudging with absurd stolidity by the side of the vehicle, which maintained a progress as deliberate as unabated. The folly of it struck me after a moment, and I jumped lightly in again, with a passing consideration for the condition of the drunkard.

He was as we had left him, motionless as though drugged. But it seemed to me that his breathing had become less labored. I bent to listen—and failed to catch the least sound of respiration.

With a sickening fear in my heart, I put a hand to

his breast; it came away moist with a liquid both warm and sticky.

In my horror I think I must have cried out aloud, for the *coupé* stopped at once. I remember pulling out a handkerchief, wiping my hands, and throwing it into the street before feeling for my match safe. With tremulous fingers, I managed to strike a light. The tiny flame sputtered and flickered feebly; I shielded it with my hand, bending over the recumbent figure.

When at last the light waxed strong and clear, and I might see for myself, I saw that the man was dead—stabbed, apparently, to the heart.

On the bottom of the carriage the light caught the sheen of nickeled steel. It was the revolver. I stooped and gathered it in.

As I rose, fingers closing over the roughened, hard rubber butt of the weapon with a feeling somehow comfortable, I heard the voice of my cabman.

"Wot's hup, gov'ner?" he asked with difficulty.

It has since occurred to me that the fellow must have been nursing a bottle, up there on the box, all the time; certainly his was a case of progressive intoxication, gathering in grandeur with the flight of time. Heaven knows that he had been sufficiently befuddled in the beginning; I knew it, too, for that matter—had recognized his condition at sight. But drunkenness had increased, rather than relaxed, its hold upon the fellow in the past hour or two. He was now almost petrified; the wonder is that he had heard my cry at all—that he had not continued wandering, by courtesy of his amiable nag, through the streets of London town the whole night long.

But intoxication has its peculiar phases. In this cabby's case, it had assumed colossal proportions; and, though he could barely keep his feet, and though his eyes, made visible by a ray of light from the hack lamps falling athwart his face as he stood sawing without the doorway, remained dull and of a certain swinish fixity, yet he was acting with a disconcerting semblance of rationality.

For my part, I heartily wished him miles deeper in the Seven Seas of Inebriety. Had he been as dead to the world as the unfortunate man in the cab, I had been more at ease.

He looked me up and down, slowly enough, as I stood —stooping, of course—within the vehicle; and he waited doggedly for his answer.

I could feel my jaw lagging; and the necessary words of explanation would not come. In ten seconds I must have invented a hundred lies, any one of which would have served to disarm suspicion—a suspicion which, in all likelihood, did not then exist in the cabby's bemussed brain—but every one of which I in panic discarded as too palpably improbable.

Indeed, I was in the devil of a hole; and the problem of prompt and neat escape loomed before my overwrought imagination as difficult of solution as the riddle of the Sphinx—whatever that may have been.

Our conveyance—if I may so dignify the rackety affair—had halted, I judged, at the intersection of two streets. I remembered slipping upon wet asphalt a moment or so before jumping into the cab to make this appalling discovery, and we had been bumping over cobbles all during the struggle. Moreover, upon two points,

almost equidistant, one could see a yellow lightening of the gloom, indicative of corner lamps.

So much I saw subconsciously, while mentally I pondered many lies. The cabby waited, at first stubbornly, but after a time impatiently. He spoke again, thickly as though his tongue had swollen.

"Wot's hup?"

Suddenly, something like terror seemed to possess me. My sole coherent idea was to get away from that cab with its ghastly fare—to get far away, and that quickly, ere my feet should become entangled in the meshes of the tragedy. A vision of myself figuring in police courts passed before my mind's eye: I foresaw my arrest; my story received with natural incredulity; myself manacled and thrown into a cell to wait the dawn; and then I saw my arraignment in the morning. Oh, I saw it all; and you may believe I was properly frightened!

I started to jump from the cab, but the cabby's burly figure interposed. The besotted fool, with drunken perversity, had seized upon the glimmering of a notion that something was wrong; he was bound to see it righted ere he proceeded or let me pass. His hand caught me upon the chest, holding me back.

"No, yer don't," he growled. "Wot's hup; w'y don't yer tell me?" he hiccoughed.

A gust of frankness carried me off my feet.

"Foul play!" I gasped. "There's a man dead in here!"

He received the information with an impassiveness that would have done credit to a detective sergeant.

"Yer don't soy?" he mumbled. "Le's 'ave a look."

His broad shoulders were abruptly inserted across the doorway, for the time being effectually blocking my egress. Escape upon the other side was barred by the circumstance of the murdered man's legs. The body had slumped down, and lay sprawled across the floor limply. I had to submit to the delay with what grace I could muster. But my mind was bent upon an immediate escape.

The cabby's hands groped about the interior and settled upon the lifeless body. I heard him muttering to himself.

"A dead un! Lor' bli' me, a dead un!" There followed a pause, as if he had been shocked into sensibility by the actual physical contact with dead flesh. When he spoke again it was in a higher tone, with a return to that remarkably clear enunciation.

"Dead! Murder—that's wot hit is! 'Ere, stroike a light, will yer?"

Dumbly I obeyed. The glare of the fusee showed me no more than I had seen before—the livid pallor of that face, starting out of the obscurity like a white mask set with lightless eyes, staring horribly, with a jaw that hung loose beneath a heavy Vandyke beard. Below this was a vanishing glimmer of white but blood-stained shirt front (the man was in evening dress), and I recall that my eye was arrested by the glimmer of a jeweled decoration on the breast of his coat.

"Good Gawd!" the cabby cried abruptly. It was as if the words were wrung out of him by main force of a master fear. I caught a glint of intelligence in his eye as he turned his red, beefy face toward me, waving frantically one outspread palm, darkened with blood.

"Good Gawd!" he bellowed. "Murder—that's wot hit is! Gawd save hus!" He turned upon me with astonishing rage, laboring under a comprehensible delusion. "Hit's yer wot done this!" he cried. "You—yer bloody body snatcher—tykin' a poor man's cab awye for——"

His words died on his lips. The match burned down to my finger tips and scorched them. I dropped it without a sound, staring fascinated into the fellow's face. And, as for him, he stood transfixed by the sight of the revolver in my hand.

It must have confirmed his worst fears. He believed himself face to face with a ruthless murderer—a man who a moment gone had not scrupled to make 'way with a fellow being in a *coupé*, who would, therefore, have no compunction about silencing a witness.

"Gawd!" he gasped.

"Be quiet, you fool!" I cried, realizing my peril.

But it was too late. A moment before he had been at my mercy; I could have silenced him, have rid myself of him and the whole terrible affair, by a threat and a discreet disappearance into the all-enveloping fog.

Now, however, he had backed suddenly out of the *coupé*, and at once was invisible. A second later his voice rose huskily upon the night, bawling at the top pitch of his lungs.

"Murder!" he howled; and again: "Murder!"

And I heard the heavy clumping of his clumsy feet as he fled down the sidewalk, waking the echoes of that nameless street with his stentorian outcries:

"Murder! murder! murder!"

CHAPTER III

THE USES OF COINCIDENCE

Ere the sound of it had died in the distance there arose a sudden racket of window sashes. Mentally I pictured the alarmed householders of the district, roused from slumber by that dread alarm, rushing in night garments to see for themselves whatever the fog might be disposed to reveal. I heard, too, cries—queries and replies bandied back and forth upon all sides:

"Hello! What's that?"

"'Murder,' Hi 'eard him sye!"

"'Oo?"

"'Ow the devil do I know? There 'e goes again!"

And loud above it all the frantic cries of that outraged cabby:

"Murder!"

In two seconds the racket was indescribable, the street in an uproar. Sharp and clear through it all came the shrill call of a police whistle.

So far as I was concerned, that sound resolved my dilemma. I was for flight—following the example of my cabby. Yet something gave me pause—a hollow moan: a sound dismal, arresting, heartrending.

The man then was not dead after all! That knowledge was like a dash of cold water in my face. I hesitated an instant, uncertain as to my duty—whether it

was to myself or to my fellow in suffering, whether to fly or to remain and be of what service I might.

And, as I stood irresolute, the full horror of my predicament was disclosed to me. With a startling clarity of imagination, I saw myself and my plight.

I was hatless, to begin with; some time during the struggle my headgear had disappeared. I remember thanking Heaven that it was unmarked with my initials —scant identification though that were. My collar was torn from my neck, my clothing disarranged—and only the light could tell to what degree it was stained with blood.

As for my hands, I knew that they bore the damning traces. And I pictured myself, in this condition, rushing through the streets of a vast, and to me wholly unknown, metropolis, seeking a refuge which in reality did not exist for me, predestined to blunder into the arms of the police.

I stood in my shoes, then, without friends, without home, without money save for a pound or two—my letters of credit being with my luggage. And I knew very well that, were I apprehended by the police, I should inevitably be connected with this affair of the *coupé*—which was likely to turn out a murder, after all, despite the evidence of my ears, which, reasoning from the man's continued groanings, assured me that the spark of life was not yet extinct within him.

In the fog, where was I to go? Dared I risk entering a hotel, however mean, in my condition—presuming that I should chance to find one?

What—figure to yourself my perplexity—was I to do?

And in this extremity, bewildered as I was, it appeared that there was nothing for it but to stick to the sole thing in all that fog-bound land that I was sure of—the *coupé*. And even to-day, when I come to consider it in the light of calm and dispassionate judgment, I can see no better course then open to me to follow.

Mad or not, then, I determined to climb on the box and drive away. I got out and closed the door very quietly, finding, to my relief, that the lock was not broken, after all, and that, therefore, it would not be liable to rattle unduly with the motion of the vehicle.

Turning to climb upon the box, I came face to face with a misty shape. I heard a voice—fortunately not loud: "'Ello! 'Ere's a *cab*!" And an instant later a man hurtled out of the shadow and precipitated himself violently upon me, shouting some words, which I don't recall, as he grabbed for my arms.

There was nothing else to do. The danger was real and instant. By good chance I put my fist square on the point of his chin, and the whole of my weight back of the blow.

He went down without a sound—transfigured weirdly, in a way, from an active human enemy into a passive, crumpled, shapeless heap at my feet.

I did not stop to ascertain the extent of his injuries, you may be sure. My purpose was only the stronger within me, and, to be frank, I do not recall coherently the events of the next hour or so.

Much as one pieces together a troubled dream in the cold light of day, I know that I jumped upon the box, grabbed the reins, and, finding the whip without delay, brought the lash down smartly on the horse's back.

There followed an astonished clatter of hoofs, which continued for some little time, during which we drew away, by degrees, from the uproar in the street.

Probably we turned many corners. I am sure I made no effort to guide the animal. How should I? After awhile the uproar grew faint. Later it died away altogether. I was alone with my wounded or dead man, with the horse and the *coupé*, again creeping at a funeral pace through the heart of midnight London, delving more deeply into the mysterious heart of that confounded fog.

I sat upon the box in a daze, a lethargy, dog-weary and heartsick, numb even to considerations of my own safety. How long this continued, I cannot tell. When next I had occasion to look at my watch the hands marked three. But much took place in the interval.

The chill of the night air had had time to penetrate to the very marrow of my bones before I seemed to waken suddenly. I drew in upon the reins. The horse stopped.

About us a dead quietness reigned. I had a suspicion that we were come into one of the more respectable residence quarters of the city. A bell boomed somewhere —a heavy, resonant, brazen shudder of sound: a single stroke. Whether it was one of the clock, or a half hour, I neither knew nor cared.

I sat pondering what was to happen in the end of the chapter. Very well I knew that I could not go on like that for the rest of time. I chuckled in grim mirth, conceiving myself the spectral hero of a modern version of the Flying Dutchman—a gaunt, ghostly figure of a cabby, doomed to thread the streets of London on such nights as that, driving a phantom horse between the

shafts of a rotten and moldering *coupé*—perhaps drawing rein now and again to take in a fare who would find himself companioned by a clattering skeleton upon the cushions.

But, fancy aside, the fog was bound to lift, discovery to come sooner or later. I was but postponing the inevitable by continuing. I sat and took thought with myself for a long time.

There seemed to be but one hope for me—to alight and knock at the first door, and, if he who answered showed any signs of human sympathy at all, to unfold my tale of woe and beg for shelter. It was a desperate chance, thus to throw myself upon the mercy of a hap-chance Englishman, but I could conceive nothing better. The worst he could do would be to hand me over to the police—a fate which was to be my certain portion in any other event, no matter what way I chose to turn.

With that thought in my mind I got down off the box and stretched my cramped legs on a sidewalk slippery with moisture.

For a space I was at a loss, undecided, as I might well have been. What way was I to turn? Should I let fate decide—strike directly across the sidewalk and knuckle a summons on the first door I discovered?

It was as good a course as any. Moreover, by pursuing that course, I would stand some show of finding my way back to that *coupé*, to which I still clung unreasonably, as to an ark of refuge. Within the compass of that night's experience, there was nothing in all London but that cab, the man within, myself, the endless streets—and fog. For the time being, that infernal vehicle was home to me—absurdly enough, I admit. I

didn't want to lose it, ere another permanent object was supplied in its place.

Presently I turned my back upon the carriage and struck straight away into the obscurity, walking tentatively, exploring the atmosphere before me with eager fingers.

An age seemed to pass before, without warning, I found myself stumbling upon cobbles. For the moment I thought that I had strayed back into the street, and was dismayed; when my left hand encountered a wall of brick, clammy and damp to the touch.

That reassured me. I felt my way along very carefully, not losing touch with that wall. Abruptly there came a turning and my arm went out into vacancy. I felt back gingerly to the wall, discovered a corner, and paused to take my breath. The fog held about me, of a density unimaginable. My hand before my face was not an evident thing.

I found myself panting—with anxiety, I suppose; and a great fatigue was dragging me down. I waited several minutes, I suppose, trying to guess the nature of my whereabouts, with no more than a hazy impression that I had come down a short, covered alleyway.

Abruptly a startling thing happened—startling, that is, to one in my overexcited state of mind.

A parallelogram of illumination was projected upon the gloom at some distance—perhaps thirty feet away, squarely ahead of me, and twenty feet or so above the ground. I fixed my eyes upon it hungrily, conceiving that I had come into a courtyard, and that the light was from a window on the farther side.

In a moment the glow was shadowed indistinctly by

shafts of a rotten and moldering *coupé*—perhaps drawing rein now and again to take in a fare who would find himself companioned by a clattering skeleton upon the cushions.

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In a moment the glow was shadowed indistinctly by

a moving form. I heard the creaking of weights and a slam as a window sash was thrown open. And then it seemed that a man was leaning out into the night. I heard him yawn.

"*Eh-yah*!" he said sleepily. "A black, damnable fog, Jack!"—apparently addressing some one in the room behind him.

The reply, were there any, was lost to me.

"And beastly late," commented the voice again. "Thanks be that I have not to be out. I think I'll go——"

He withdrew his head, I deduced, and shut the window. A slam cut short his words, and at once the light began to vanish by degrees, as though an unseen hand within the room were pulling down the shade.

But before it disappeared entirely, I was making toward it—treading rough cobbles again. In a moment I had fallen over a doorstep and barked both shins painfully. I was up instantly, however, and, with my heart beating like a wild thing, had my hand on the knob of a door.

It turned without resistance. I stepped into a dark, close hallway, moved forward, and planted a foot on a step.

Above me a door opened, flooding the upper landing with light, by which aid I made out a steep flight of stairs ahead of me. There were voices—drowsy, drawling, befitting the lateness of the hour:

"Well, good night, Jack."

"'Night, old chap."

"See you in the morning."

"Sure-ly. 'Night."

"I'll leave the door open to light you upstairs."

"Thanks—awfully, old man."

Footsteps ascended the upper flight. I shut the outer door and stamped boldly up the stairs. The footsteps above me ceased, but the door continued ajar. When I had gained the landing I made out the figure of a man, holding in one hand a lamp, and staring at me.

"Why, Murchison," said a familiar voice, "I thought I heard you come in an hour ago! Chamberlain has just gone up, you know, and I thought——"

The man paused, thunderstruck. Well he might have been, considering the unholy apparition I must have presented. He stood, eyes wide, mouth open, a picture of stupefaction, while I advanced.

As for myself, I was half mad with delight. Chance, that had played with me so mercilessly that night, had turned about and favored me at last.

I stepped forward with both hands outstretched and tremulous with agitation.

"Sevrance!" I cried. "Tony, my friend, don't you know me?"

CHAPTER IV

AN ENGLISH GENTLEMAN

WITHOUT a word Sevrance turned and retreated into the room, his back to me, until he reached a table upon which he deposited the lamp. Then he stood quietly to one side to watch me as I entered.

I have always held him the coolest man of my acquaintance. At the moment, I confess, I found his conduct exasperatingly frigid. He glanced me up and down, keenly, his sharp gray eyes losing no point in my disheveled appearance.

"Sevrance!" I said piteously, pausing within the door, dismayed by this reception, so entirely different from that which I had anticipated from the moment in the courtyard when my ears had recognized his voice.

He was sucking a short, black pipe. He nodded shortly, removing this from between his teeth long enough to say "Good evening," distantly, adding: "Come in, shut the door, and sit down."

I obeyed mutely, very unhappy, not in the least understanding this lack of cordiality on his part. When I had slumped ungracefully into the most comfortable chair that I ever rested in, he spoke again:

"Drunk?" he inquired, lifting his fine eyebrows.

"Sevrance!" I half arose, indignantly.

"Don't be angry," he placated me. "I was of two

minds whether or not to offer you a drink. It's at your elbow, if you care for it, you know."

I turned and saw a couple of bottles, soda and glasses. It appealed to me that never in a misspent life had I desired drink so ardently. I buried my nose in six inches of whiskey and soda—and sighed with regret that it was gone so soon. Nevertheless, I was conscious of an immediate sensation of renewed strength.

"Sevrance—" I began again, finding myself still under the calm scrutiny of those two indifferent eyes.

"Your pardon," he interrupted brusquely. "You're making free with my name and hospitality, and you seem to be acquainted with me personally, sir. But you will allow that I am not to be blamed for wondering who the devil you may happen to be. When a man, all a-mess with what seems to be blood and mud, staggers into my study in the dead of night and offers no——"

"Sevrance!" I parroted again protestingly. At the time it seemed to be the only word that I was able to utter.

He waved a deprecating hand. "You've said that before, you know," he commented mildly.

"Traill," I managed to get out. "Traill. Don't you know me?"

His eyes expressed blank incredulity. He came closer, stared without excusing himself.

"I confess," he admitted at length, "that I have a very dear friend, resident in the city of New York, whom you might be thought to resemble. But to the best of my knowledge, my dear sir, Mr. Gordon Traill is still in the States——"

"But I'm not, man! Can't you see——"

"My dear fellow," he interrupted, an amused twinkle in his eyes, deeper amusement in his voice, "if you will step into the bathroom and glance at yourself in the glass, before washing your face—an operation of which it is sadly in need—you will see my excuse for not recognizing you—always allowing that you're really Traill."

He drew aside a curtain over a doorway, and I, beginning to comprehend, walked past him into the lavatory. Sevrance himself turned up the light. I glared at a haggard mask that confronted me in the mirror above the washstand—the veriest caricature of my physiognomy that I can imagine—a wan, sunken-eyed face, spattered with dried blood, smeared with smut and grime, wonderfully pallid beneath the dirt.

"Good Lord!" I conceded ruefully. "I *don't* blame you, Tony."

"Can you, honestly?"

He laughed and left me to myself. I splashed for a full five minutes, and felt like a new man when I finally emerged.

"Now," I said, falling in with his humor, "if you'll lend me a collar, sir, and a whisk broom, I'll remove the remainder of my disguise."

Sevrance shook his head and my hand.

"You shouldn't, Gordon," he chuckled. "It was complete and—clever, you know. It was great, as you say in the States. How the deuce did you think of it, now?"

"I'll tell you," I returned, "at a price"—nodding toward the tray.

"I'm willing to pay double for your story," he agreed. "When did you arrive? Why didn't you cable,

advising me of your coming? And what under high heaven *have* you been up to?"

He stooped over the bottles, facing me. You must know him—a very tall, slimly built figure of a man, at that moment in immaculate evening attire. To my way of thinking, he is one of the finest men in the world, and of the best to look upon.

His features are of an ascetic cast, clean shaven always. His forehead is broad, high, and very white; for that matter, there is little color in his complexion—he is naturally pale. His nose is slightly aquiline and very slender; his mouth thin of lip, firm, sympathetic; his chin square. But his eyes one sees first of all, and remembers forever after—eyes of a good size, very bright, alert—gray—with humor lurking in their depths. He carries himself sedately, with a certain detached dignity.

There is the man whom I saw standing before me as I sat and retailed my marvelous adventure: Anthony Sevrance, barrister, gentleman—than whom no man ever rejoiced in a friend more brave and loyal.

He heard me out with not a comment other than the dancing play of expression in his eyes. His features, as generally, remained impassive—they are of a judicial mold. In the end: "Seriously," he assured me, "I was never more glad to lay eyes on living man—and that though I didn't know you, Gordon."

"Do you wonder?" I said disconsolately.

"Not a bit—but you are back in the nick of time. Julia is engaged to the German."

I stood up, gripping the table. My voice sounded far away to me. "Is it true?" I heard myself say.

He took my hand compassionately.

"Quite," said he. "But—they're not married yet." And, his gaze meeting mine, he smiled, adding: "Moreover, I venture to prophesy that they are not to be—now."

Presently the blood began to flow back to my heart. I knew that he spoke the truth—that there was hope. I knew that I should never abandon the hope of winning Heart's Desire until the very end of all things.

And, oddly, my mind went back to less material matters.

"That," I said, "is for the morrow. At present, I have a duty."

"What is that?" he inquired.

"To do what I can for the fellow in the cab."

"Oh, the deuce! I'd forgotten him. Like as not he's beyond aid."

"We'll have to see—that's plain humanity. Do you mind if I bring him in here?"

"What else will you do? Take him to—the Carleton?"

We shared the laugh.

"Come," he added. "I'll go with you. Oh, but you'd never find your way back, if I didn't. Moreover, you don't suppose that you alone can carry the fellow up here, do you?"

But, of course, my remonstrance had been merely perfunctory. As far as I myself was concerned, I felt bound to see the adventure through to its finale; but with regard to Sevrance, though I needed sorely his assistance, I had shrunk for a minute or so from dragging him into the sordid tragedy. However, I was well enough content to find him so keen to aid me.

We went out again into the night and the fog. Fresh from the warmth of Sevrance's chambers, I shivered in the chill of the early morning air. It was very cold, dank, and penetrating.

Sevrance led the way, I tagging him closely. But he seemed to know the place as intimately as the palm of his hand. In no time at all, it seemed, we were down the covered passageway—I had been right in that conjecture—and out in the street. Almost immediately we came upon the *coupé*, standing in approximately the same place and condition wherein I had left it.

Sevrance opened the door, lighting a match and peering in. Then he stepped inside and bent over, with his head to the man's breast.

"You are right," he said presently, in a guarded tone. "Your—friend is stabbed; but he's alive and like to live for many a long day—if he manages to shake off the effects of the drug."

"Drug!" I cried.

"Drug," he reiterated. "The man is not drunk—although it would seem that he had been drinking. For that matter so have I, this night—a glass or two of champagne." He turned back the lid of the man's eye, holding a match close to the eyeball. "A powerful opiate," he announced. "The wound is merely a superficial matter. Your interference probably saved him. Odd—great heavens!"

"What's the trouble?" I demanded, alarmed.

He blew out the match.

"Here, give me a hand with the fellow," he replied. "No words. We want to be quick about this. I'll explain later."

He shifted the sleeper's feet toward me, and I got them in a firm grasp. With some trouble we managed to lift him from the carriage. The swaying of it relieved me of an embarrassment. Hardly had Sevrance put both feet upon the ground when the horse seemed to wake up, as if it, like its owner, had been snatching a brief, alcoholic nap.

Incontinently it started off of its own accord. Sevrance, his arms clasped around the body of the unconscious man, turned and gazed after the vanishing *coupé*. Before I could really comprehend what was taking place, it was swallowed up by the fog.

I found the sensation unusual. It was as if a fragment of my nightmare had detached itself, moved out of the picture. I felt as though the events of the evening had been untrue, in the nature of an hallucination. Only the weight of the man whose lower limbs I was embracing convinced me that I did not dream —only he remained to prove the reality of my adventure.

As for Sevrance, he gave the *coupé* an ironic bow.

"Do you know," he said softly; and at first I fancied he was speaking to me, though it developed that he was addressing my friend, the horse: "Do you know, I consider that uncommon handsome of you. You have solved the dilemma quite neatly and reasonably. Good night—and many thanks."

If you have never carried an unconscious man in your arms, you have little understanding of what a task lay before us. He was like putty, limp and invertebrate; he seemed to weigh a ton. Neither Sevrance nor myself is to be counted a weakling; yet we had our hands full,

I can assure you. When at length we had deposited the body on a couch in Sevrance's study, we were both quite out of breath.

Sevrance at once knelt by the man's side, despite his fatigue. For myself, I collapsed completely in a chair, and sat puffing and blowing like a healthy porpoise. And I found it irritating in the extreme to have to wait until my wind came back to me in order to put the question that was burning my tongue. But finally:

"Sevrance," said I, "who is he?"

Sevrance stood up, taking off his coat and rolling back his cuffs. There was a queer look in his eyes.

"An acquaintance of mine," he replied. "A Russian—by the name of De Netze. The moving thing about it all is this: that I saw him not fifteen minutes before you met him, at the very house, I believe, from which you saw him carried; and he was then as sober as you or I at this minute."

"Then—what——"

"Gordon, I don't know," he returned seriously. "Frankly, I have heard it said that M. de Netze was a secret agent of the Russian Government, and this would seem to confirm the statement. It is rank with the stench of Nihilism—this outrage. At least, it is so to my mind."

I bent closer to get my first good look at the fellow. He lay at length—a short but slender man, whom I recognized instantly for him whom the others had supported from the house. I knew him by his thickish red lips, by his high, pallid brows, by the neatly trimmed Vandyke beard, brown but streaked with silver gray.

"That is the same man," I affirmed.

"You're sure?" He seemed almost to wish to doubt my identification.

"Certain," I replied. "Why? Whose was the house?"

Sevrance smiled inscrutably.

"You'll be surprised."

I made an impatient movement.

"It was—Lady Herbert's," he informed me.

I stared blankly.

"Julia's?" I gasped, incredulous.

"Exactly; she received to-night. Monsieur de Netze, a close friend of Captain von Holzborn, your rival, happened to be an invited guest."

"But what do you make of it?"

He lifted his brows. "Apparently Julia's guests were, at least in part, of a certain quality. Many of Holzborn's friends would naturally be present, you understand. I myself noted a fair sprinkling of foreigners. . . . De Netze!" He smiled whimsically. "This will drive him to despair. He must have been assisted from the house while already in the besotted state that you describe. The disgrace of it will madden the man; he is very punctilious, very careful, reserved and quiet—as I know him. No—he'll not be pleased, when he wakes in the morning."

"I could understand that he might be a bit fretful," I remarked. "If you drug and stick a knife into me, I shall show evidences of irritation."

It seems but an instant later that I caught myself up sharply at the very moment when my head was dropping drowsily forward to find a resting place on the table by my side.

Sevrance turned from the Russian at about the same time, and looked me over with an amused gleam in his eyes.

"You're just about done," he announced authoritatively. "Take the couch there; De Netze must have my bed, of course."

"And you—?" I inquired sleepily.

"Oh, a rug before the fire will do for me," he returned airily. "Come, to bed with you."

"No," I protested; "I shall be well content with the rug myself."

"You won't get it."

Sevrance came over and with a firm hand piloted me toward a divan; I was too unutterably weary to resist. I remember fairly falling over upon my back and lying there, enveloped in delicious anticipation of rest.

"Now, you sleep," I heard Sevrance say.

"Yes," I agreed meekly. Sevrance seemed to fade out of the room. My eyes closed. I sank slowly into a placid gulf of slumber. But I was not yet done with that wretched Russian; the thought of him, a nagging care for his welfare, buzzed within my head. I sat up suddenly—so suddenly that Sevrance, his notice attracted by the movement, turned, startled almost out of his stolidity.

"What about the doctor?" I demanded.

"Doctor? What doctor?"

I pointed. "For him."

"He doesn't need one; I know enough to render first aid to the injured, and a little more."

"But——"

"Lie down, you ass. Don't you understand that,

under the circumstances, the man may well wish to be left alone—not to have this adventure noised abroad? Didn't I tell you that he was a Russian secret agent? If he wants a physician when he recovers consciousness he shall have one."

At that point my consciousness guttered and went out like a candle that has burned down to the socket.

CHAPTER V

THE DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

LATE in the afternoon of the following day I awoke voluntarily, physically rested, and with a head at least normally clear.

Sevrance was out of the room. I sat up on the side of the couch, yawning, digging my fists into my eyes, feeling uncommonly bedraggled, like a man who has misspent a night. I longed for a bath and a change of linen.

In the semidarkness of the study—that infernal fog still held, the prospect from the windows was one of a dun-hued nothingness, horribly depressing—I did not at once become conscious of another's presence. But after a while, as I rose and made for the buffet against the opposite wall, a voice greeted me.

"Monsieur Traill, I believe?"

It was a thin, clear voice, impressing me somehow as the blade of a sword, metallically flawless and pliable. The intonation was low, discreet, courteous.

I turned. The speaker sat in a large armchair near the center table propped up by pillows from which his face stared out like a death mask set with two black and hard eyes, as brilliant and as cold as black diamonds.

"Monsieur de Netze?" I inquired.

"He whom you rescued," he replied, with a graceful movement of that white face. "I have gratitude

to express to my benefactor," he continued, painfully precise.

I stammered. Thanks always confuse me. "We were both in the same box, and I hit upon this refuge by sheer good luck. In conscience, Sevrance and I did what we could for you."

"You were very kind—very," he insisted. He extended, slowly, a slim hand, white and delicate as a woman's, seemingly as fragile as a bit of porcelain. I clasped it diffidently, fearful of hurting it, and was amazed by the strength and vigor of the Russian's grasp; it was as hearty as the warm handshake of a man in the prime of his life and health; the thin, tapering fingers fairly sank into my flesh. De Netze recognized my astonishment.

"You are surprised," he stated. "But I have much reserve force. It takes more than a taste of opium—or whatever it was—and the scratch of a knife to—'put me out,' do you say?" He smiled wanly. "But, on the other hand, I have you to thank that I may continue to live."

I looked away uneasily. "It was nothing—nothing. You would have done as much——"

"No."

"What?"

I stared rudely.

He repeated the monosyllable with incorrigible decision: "No."

"I beg your pardon," said I, knowing not what else to say.

"I would have cared for my precious skin, first of all—my invaluable person," he continued placidly.

"Monsieur Sevrance tells me that he believes me a secret agent of the Russian Government—eh? Possibly he mentioned as much to you?"

"Why—yes," I admitted, wondering.

"It is so. I ask you not to violate the confidence, monsieur."

"Surely not."

"Of course—it is merely a formal request, in order that you may thoroughly understand the necessity. You can, knowing it, conceive that my services are of some value to his Majesty the Czar. Otherwise—" He put a hand significantly to his breast.

"I understand," I murmured—not very sympathetically, I fear.

"For which reason I would consider my continued existence more important than the mere preservation of an unknown man's life, you understand. That is why I say that, in a predicament similar to that in which you found yourself last night, I should have left you to your fate without a qualm of conscience. I trust that you comprehend the delicacy of my position? Believe me, I am sincerely grateful——"

It is an unusual sensation to be thanked by a man who, in the same breath, tells you that your welfare would be nothing to him in any case of danger. I found nothing to say. I merely nodded.

"You do not understand," he stated with conviction, his bright eyes steadfast on my own. "No matter; at any other time—when my services are not so essential to my master, you may command me to the uttermost. I even trust that you will find occasion to do so."

I bowed my appreciation. For a second or two there was silence. Then, suddenly, "Monsieur Sevrance," he told me, "is arranging for my removal to another place, where you will not be exposed to the danger that attends upon my every step and movement."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"You saw for yourself," he returned the obvious answer. Before I could turn the trend of the conversation he had commanded me. "Talking wearies me a trifle," he said. "Monsieur Sevrance has been kind enough to give me a digest of your adventure last night. May I ask you to enlarge upon it, with more particularity?"

"Oh, assuredly, you may." I sat down, found a cigarette, and, somewhat comforted by it, delivered myself of a *résumé* of the affair.

De Netze listened with a strained attentiveness, never once removing those beadlike, glittering eyes from my own. When I had concluded he put a pertinent question or two: As to the appearance of his companions? Would I remember the man's voice if I heard it again? Could I explain the circumstance of my detention in the *coupé*, and why I had not been pistoled at my first change from a passive to an active participant in the affair?

To the first two questions I had sufficiently vague answers to make—I had made no particular note of the appearance of the men, and retained but a transient impression of the face of my antagonist in the cab. Possibly I might, or might not, know him by his voice, if I should hear it within a short time. Memories fade quickly.

As to my detention, I had a vague theory that, perhaps, I had not been forcibly ejected because the fellow feared that I might raise an alarm. In the beginning, he had plainly thought me his companion. Afterwards, the above explanation applied; or he may have purposed slipping suddenly from the vehicle and leaving me with the circumstantial evidence of the wounded or dead man to identify me with the affair.

He may have contemplated an incontinent butchery of the pair of us, the better to be rid of all witnesses—something which my unexpected assault may have forestalled. As to the revolver, I had that in my pocket.

"Here it is," I concluded, producing the weapon.

De Netze examined it curiously. "Ah, yes," he nodded. "Now I begin to understand. You observe." He swung his arm out, with remarkable quickness, and pulled the trigger.

The hammer snapped; there was no explosion. "Very fortunately for you, perhaps," he said gravely, "one of the cartridges is jammed in the cylinder. Ah, yes—very fortunate, I should say."

"I wonder what became of the knife," I speculated. "He would have stuck me had he had it, I'm convinced, before he made his escape."

"He didn't have it," affirmed De Netze.

"How do you know?"

"I was stabbed before you entered the *coupé*, in all likelihood. Do you remember passing anyone as you descended the stairs of Lady Herbert's?"

"It seems to me that I do," I assented doubtfully. When I came to think of it, there was, in fact, a faint and indistinct memory of a figure which passed me, but

to which I then gave no heed. But I could not swear to the fact.

"That is it." He was positive. "My friends"—his smile, as he said this, was indescribably evil and malevolent—"were somewhat thoughtless in their haste. One had forgotten something. He returned to get it. That is how you became involved. It is very clear."

"You should have no difficulty," I advanced, "in determining their identity."

"I have no doubts as to them at all."

"You know them?"

"Almost to a certainty."

"Then, I suppose, you will at once lodge information with the police."

But he lifted up one fine and transparent hand with a slight, negative gesture. "To the contrary."

"You will not——?"

"Seek revenge, Monsieur Traill? But yes, and in my own way—in my own good time. This is not an affair for your brutal and headlong English police, nor for the edification of the British newspaper constituency. On the other hand, I promise you that those gentlemen will meet with appropriate fate without the news of the matter reaching the police courts."

He stared contemplatively at the ceiling for a while.

"They will be in France by now." He delivered an expert opinion at length. "In France—yes." He nodded with assurance. "That is, unless they feel sure of my complete annihilation and of your remaining quiet—which is not conceivable, under the circumstances."

Some time later the door was thrown unceremoni-

ously open and three men entered. Sevrance's greeting was prompt.

"Well, Gordon! Up and fresh, I see?"

"And ravenous," I amended.

"Monsieur de Netze," he continued, "you see I have been successful, despite the fog."

"I am deeply sensible of your kindness," said the Russian ceremoniously. "But, for the fog, is it not your native element?" he added, with a smile. And then I heard him say: "Good morning, Captain. Fritz, good morning."

Sevrance turned to the man who had first entered the room. There was a twinkle in his eyes as he introduced us:

"Captain von Holzborn, permit me—Mr. Traill, of New York—Captain von Holzborn, of the German Embassy."

You will understand a certain inevitable confusion to which I was a prey because of this totally unexpected meeting with the man. Already I had formed an opinion of him, based upon a thoroughly unwarranted mental conception. I was now to revise this impression to the final detail.

He stood for a brief moment, looking directly into my eyes. I saw a man to be feared, admired, hated, but one never to be regarded with indifference. A certain assertiveness of spirit, not wholly pleasant, seemed in a way unceremoniously to shoulder his personality upon your imagination; you did not quickly forget him, even though you had met him but once—or so I have been assured by others who knew the man but slightly.

I have often wondered what high place in the coun-

cils of his nation he might not have filled had not the threads of our two lives, even then weaving on the loom of Destiny, have become so inextricably entangled in the days to come.

One thing I regard as certain and undeniable—he was worthy of the highest place possible of achievement. He was a wonderful scoundrel, a rogue of the highest order of intelligence, a devil of infinite ambitions, a man of splendid abilities—when his due is rendered unto him.

But—his memory is hateful to me to this day.

Let me, then, show to you Von Holzborn as he was, as I was to know him, in his proper person.

He stood within an inch or two of six feet—a height added to by the military bearing which became him very well. He was broad and square-set at the shoulders, heavily built throughout, but slender and lean at the loins. By habit he kept both feet upon the ground, bearing squarely upon both. His chin was always well up, his neck rigid by training; he faced the world so, squarely—with the trace of an unaccountable defiance in his manner.

He was dark-skinned and his hair and brows were black and heavy. His countenance impressed you by its frank immobility; it was, in fact, a mask, as inscrutable as his eyes.

The latter were black, and hard and absolutely without luster; I have seen the light glint off from them, but never a glitter within their depths, whatever his emotion; they were impressively opaque and as impassive as a blank wall. They said: "You shall see not one half an inch beyond us. You shall receive not the least inkling of what goes on in the mind behind us."

They spoke the truth. Their one failing was an indescribable one, in a way—they had a trick of looking swiftly away from you. At least, whenever you met his straightforward gaze you always were conscious of an effect as though he had glanced aside just the moment gone—but you never caught him at it, for all your cunning.

Aside from this, he had a heavy and solid chin with a deep cleft; a mouth firm and straight of lip but rather attractive in its suggestion of human sympathy; his nose was not too large, not too straight; his ears set well back against his head. He affected a short and heavy mustache.

His voice was deep, rich, carefully modulated, as capable of expressing every emotional *nuance* as a Stradivarius (to strain a simile). As a rule he spoke quickly, without a trace of accent when he used English —not so purely in French, but as fluently—and wasted few words. He was as alert as an American; as imperturbable as a Englishman; as engaging as a Frenchman —when he chose; as determined as a German—all in one man.

As for the other, whom De Netze had called "Fritz," he was Von Holzborn's valet, I discovered—a spare and active man of medium stature, trained in the German army; with an eager but pinched face, and a mouth like a steel trap. He never volunteered a word—never spoke until addressed.

Von Holzborn gave me a civil word of greeting. "I have heard your name before, Mr. Traill," he added pleasantly.

"From Sevrance?" I said, for the moment forget-

ting our position as rivals—of which, to be sure, Holzborn was not yet apprised.

"No—although Mr. Sevrance has spoken of you. Your name is not infrequently upon the lips of my *fiancée*—Lady Herbert."

"We are old friends," I said as simply as I could. "I am glad that she has not forgotten me."

I know not in what manner I managed to betray myself, but, for an instant, I was aware that his hard, cold eyes were boring into my own, like twin gimlets. And then he turned brusquely away, addressing De Netze:

"You are able to move?"

De Netze turned up the palms of his hands expressively.

"I must," he said laconically.

"We will wait until dusk," Von Holzborn stated.

"But the fog—" De Netze began to argue.

Von Holzborn interrupted, in a tone of authority: "Be advised. I have made all arrangements. It is best."

I fancied that De Netze resented his attitude; he asserted himself oddly.

"You shall not lose because of your courtesy," he said.

The Prussian nodded shortly.

"I have all the details through Mr. Sevrance," he remarked a moment later. "Have you anything to add?"

"Nothing of interest to you. But still—you may as well be put upon your guard. I was drinking with Sept at the buffet, I remember. We had two glasses

of champagne. He inquired if I had the information safely, and I told him yes. By accident some one brushed rather heavily against me, and put his elbow in my ribs; an envelope—a personal note of no importance—crackled in my pocket."

De Netze paused for breath. Sevrance silently handed him a wineglass of port, for which he nodded thanks, and which he sipped from time to time during the remainder of his stay.

"Sept," he continued, "raised his eyebrows significantly. 'There, in your pocket?' he asked. I told him no, carelessly. A moment later we drained our glasses. I did not see him make any movement, but I recall that, for an instant, my attention was attracted to the farther room. Almost instantly I was conscious of an overpowering faintness. I mentioned this, and Sept offered his arm. I have forgotten what he said. While we were walking toward the door, I lost consciousness, and remember nothing until I wakened in Mr. Sevrance's bed."

He paused. The Prussian made no comment other than by a brief nod of his head.

"I fancied Sept trustworthy, too," De Netze added.

"You must have been all right, as to appearances, until you reached the open air," Holzborn said deliberately. "No word to the contrary has reached me. Von Beller was with Sept, but left you at the carriage door, and returned. I do not think——"

"You will have him—watched," interrupted De Netze decidedly.

Von Holzborn bent forward with a murmured word of apology to Sevrance and myself, and began to confer

in a low tone with the Russian. Sevrance led me to the buffet, offering me port and biscuit.

"We dine at the club in an hour and a half," he said. "I'm sorry—there's nothing else here—but this will stay you while you wash and dress. I've sent to the Carleton for your luggage, but I suppose I shall have to lend you a suit of my own evening clothes. Can you struggle along with them?"

"I'll endure even that humiliation," I said, munching a Bent's, "for the sake of food. Man, I'm famished!"

Presently he led me into his dressing room and laid out a change of linen and a suit of evening clothes. "You can manage?" he asked. "Because of this business—fearing complications, you understand—I gave my man a holiday."

He sat on the edge of the bed and puffed at a cigarette, smiling faintly.

"I can't say that I'm in love with either De Netze or Von Holzborn," he remarked quietly; "but, when they're thrown upon my mercy in this way, why, I feel as if bound to do my best for them."

"Of course," I assented.

I stepped into the bathroom, stripped and floundered for ten minutes in a tub of cold water. When I came out, feeling like a new man, I made shift to fit myself into Sevrance's evening clothes. We are much of a size, fortunately, and I managed fairly well. Sevrance has a nice taste in the matter of clothing, and when he looked me over with a critical eye and pronounced that I would do, I felt more comfortable; moreover, the dinner hour was appreciably nearer.

De Netze and the Prussian were still confabulating

when we returned to the study; the man Fritz was standing by the door, in precisely the same spot where he had halted upon entering the room, mute and stiff as any ramrod. Von Holzborn immediately terminated his talk, however, and arose from a chair which he had drawn to the Russian's side.

Sevrance put a match to the wick of the lamp on the study table; it was time; already the mist without was a dirty slate color, night would be upon us in a twinkling.

"We shall start now," said the German "I have to thank you very heartily for your kindness—and your thoughtfulness."

"Oh, that is nothing," my friend parried, as embarrassed as an Englishman always is when you try to tell him that he has behaved like a white man.

De Netze, to my infinite surprise, got up without assistance. "And I, also—" he began.

"Not another word!" Sevrance protested hastily. "Come, let's get along."

"You don't purpose coming with us?" said the Russian.

"Why not?" Sevrance looked up sharply. "Traill and I are going to dine. We fancied you might be willing to give us a lift in your carriage and set us down at the Primordial."

"You are perfectly welcome," Von Holzborn put in, with a short laugh. "That is," he amended, "if you are willing to chance the risk."

"Risk?" I inquired.

The Prussian gave me a glimpse of those opaque eyes. "There's danger," he said curtly.

"To be frank with you," added the Russian, "Monsieur de Holzborn is known for my very good friend. We fear that his lodgings may have been watched——"

"In this beastly fog?" Sevrance protested.

"Even so. If his carriage has been noticed and followed, it is barely possible that we may be attacked before we reach a safe place."

I heard Sevrance express a terse opinion, beneath his breath—"Rot!" was what he said—and I confess that my views resembled his own; for the life of me I could not imagine how a cab could have been tracked through a fog as dense as that.

Aloud: "So much the more reason why you should travel well guarded, then," said Sevrance. "Traill and I will be glad enough to bear you company—as far as the Primordial Club, at least."

"On your own heads—" commented Von Holzborn, lifting his shoulders indifferently.

Accordingly, we decided to accompany them, with the more reason since, as Sevrance pointed out, it would be the devil of a deal of trouble to come upon another cab that night. For my part, I was in no mind to let any fanciful danger whatsoever stand between me and my food. I would have dared the whole Russian army for a good dinner.

And so, with a slight delay for preparation, we set out. Fritz, I remember, went ahead—silently, confidently. De Netze and his German friend went next, the Russian leaning heavily upon the other's arm, Sevrance and I bringing up the rear.

I waited for Sevrance to lock his door, quite assured that I needed his guidance before the blank blackness

of the fog-bound courtyard. De Netze and Von Holzborn had struck out boldly, without waiting; nor did we come up with them until we were clear of the covered alleyway and had blundered into a waiting hack—a vehicle which, I understand, was the captain's private turnout.

I heard Von Holzborn's voice, pitched in an angry undertone, before we encountered the trio. A second later they loomed blackly before us. De Netze was seemingly attempting to pacify the Prussian, who was interrogating the coachman, I gathered. I heard him say "Blockhead!" furiously.

"The man was not to blame, *mon ami*," interposed the Russian.

Von Holzborn turned upon his man Fritz. By this time we were near enough to make out that the fellow was standing stolidly to one side, holding his right forearm with his left hand and staring off into the obscurity.

"How did it happen?" Von Holzborn demanded.

The valet stiffened, dropping his hand to his side. "I followed your instructions, Herr Captain," he said respectfully. "Entering the carriage I fell against some person who attempted to stab me." He added two or three phrases in German, doggedly. "And so," he concluded, "the fellow got away. Ernest"—he nodded toward the coachman's box—"will tell you ass much. I haf my best done, Herr Captain. It iss not my fault."

"Oh, that's palpable," De Netze affirmed decidedly.

"What's this?" Sevrance put in.

The Russian explained calmly. There had been an assassin waiting in the carriage; their precaution in

sending Fritz on ahead had saved the Russian's life for the second time.

"You see," he concluded, "we were not mistaken. They are watching me like cats a mouse."

I saw him slip something into Fritz's palm; Von Holzborn's back was turned. The valet saluted with his hurt arm.

"A mere scratch," he assured me, in reply to my question, and climbed upon the box with the coachman, being so ordered by his master.

CHAPTER VI

"HEART'S DESIRE"

NEVER in my life do I recall disposing of a meal so tremendous as that night's; my appetite seemed positively insatiable. You will find my excuse in the fact that I had not broken my fast since noon of the previous day. And the Primordial is famous for its kitchen.

In the end, satisfied, we lingered an hour or more over *liqueurs* and cigars, Sevrance strangely silent and uncommunicative, I—if the truth must out—rather torpid.

But at length I roused. Having slept practically a round of the clock, I was beginning to feel fit as a fiddle. My mind inevitably reverted to the two men from whom we had recently parted.

"There," said I, "went Romance," thinking of the cab as it whirled off its occupants into the fog, the fear of death in their hearts.

"Rather," argued Sevrance, looking up from his cigar, "here begins Romance."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, dear fellow, that the game's afoot—and no more."

"Why—" I drawled blankly.

"Oh, faith!" he said impatiently. "You don't mean to tell me that you think yourself rid of Holzborn, simply because you have arrived in London?"

"No-o-o."

"For you're not. You lingered in the States overlong, Gordon. Now," he laughed, "your true love's betrothed to another. Your task assumes the proportion of a cutting-out expedition, eh? You have Holzborn to dispose of, and, frankly, I'm not at all sure that you'll find him complaisant."

He leaned back in his chair, playing with an empty wineglass. "I know the man, you see," he mused aloud. "He's big and strong and purposeful. He's bent on marrying our little lady, and he's rather apt to have his way, you know—barring an unsuspected flaw in her affection for him. He's on his uppers, financially, I happen to know, and that will make him only the more determined."

"I don't fear him," said I with a confidence that belied my state of mind. I did fear the man—horribly, now that I knew him—not physically, you understand, but as a rival of infinite address and charm. From the little I had seen of him I could understand that he was of the type that has a powerful fascination for the hearts of women.

"That may be," admitted Sevrance. "On the other hand, you've to consider that he doesn't fear you—nor even regard you as a factor, as yet."

I was not so sure of that, however.

"That's your strongest weapon against him, so far," Sevrance went on. "You had best make your hay while he's occupied with more pressing matters. This Netze affair will occupy his mind and person for a day or two, I imagine."

"By the way"—I put in the question that had been

worrying me the day through—"how does he, an *attaché* to the German legation, happen to be mixed up in a Russian conspiracy?"

"He hasn't said," Sevrance returned dryly. "I'm sure I can't imagine, and in honor I'm bound not to try to find out."

I sulked under this gentle reproof—a condition from which Sevrance found an effectual means to rouse me. He glanced at his watch.

"Half after nine," he announced: "time we were off, if we're to accomplish anything this night."

"What do you mean?"

He produced an envelope and held it up for my inspection. "I've stalls for the opera," said he; "I knew you were a lover of fine music—and Calvé sings to-night. 'Carmen,' by special arrangement, you know."

I gulped over my disappointment.

"Hang the opera!" I told him. "What the dickens——"

"Tush, angry child!" he laughed. "Do you suppose that I, your humble but faithful servant, would trifle with your young affections? To the contrary. Come—let's be off."

"Sevrance—!" I cried.

"I'll lay you a guinea that we find old friends there."

"Done," said I, at last comprehending. "And I hope I lose."

"So do I, Gordon," he assured me with great solemnity.

If you know London, you know—as I then did not

—that the Primordial is but a step from Covent Garden. For all that, Sevrance must needs call a cab; I may mention that never have I known him to take a single step in the street when a cab would have served his purpose. We were in the theater without delay, late though we were.

The curtain was just going up on the second act as we squirmed into our stalls, to the impassive indignation of a row of English folk who found it necessary to arise and give us way. I sank into my seat with a sigh of relief; I know not what it is that always makes me feel like a pickpocket when I am obliged to disturb seat-holders in a theater.

And, to evade the hostile stares of those outraged Britishers, whose toes I had so severely trodden, I promptly hid my face in my programme. For this reason, together with what followed, I remember nothing at all of the music or action of Bizet's masterpiece as produced in Covent Garden, London, upon that second night of my stay in that city. For all I of my certain knowledge could say to the contrary, a songless farce might have been the production. For hardly had I begun to recover my self-respect than Sevrance quietly called my attention to that which had drawn me across the Atlantic, my Heart's Desire.

"There," he indicated, with a discreet nod.

I hardly dared look. "Where?" I whispered; and was wretchedly conscious that not only had my whisper betrayed my inward agitation, but that a wave of blood had swept into my face. I'm sure it must have blazed like a danger signal, in spite of my efforts to seem indifferent.

Sevrance regarded me with a sardonic eye. "Are you choking?" he inquired, unmoved.

I managed to call him a brute. He compressed his lips meekly.

"True," he sighed sentimentally. "Ah, true! Moonstruck calf!" he added, with a vindictive snarl.

I was about to threaten him with grievous bodily hurt, when he abruptly had mercy upon me and stopped short, fastening his attention upon the stage.

Presently I mustered up my courage and looked.

The width of the house lay between me and the woman, who sat, languidly following the action on the stage, with one white and rounded arm motionless on the rail of a box in the first tier—the second or third back from the proscenium arch. I was at liberty to stare, unresented, to the full of my great desire.

To me she seemed as a jewel in a somber setting. She was all in black, and the darkness of the darkened auditorium was behind her, but the footlights' glare struck back and seemed to envelop her in an aureole of gentle radiance. The playhouse and the audience receded into the background of my vision; indeed, I forgot them. I was aware only of Heart's Desire, poised, seemingly, in midair above me: of the glamour of sunlight in her hair, the immaculate pallor of her arms and shoulders, the clear brilliance of her colorings, as fresh and fadeless as a young girl's—*the* coloring of the girl whom I had known and loved long years gone. . . .

I remember breathing with difficulty. What Sevrance had suggested was true; she had left America a girl, beautiful but undeveloped. As such I had remembered and loved her all these years.

And now she was transformed into a woman's full stature and estate; I have heard her called the most bewitchingly pretty woman in the world, and so she seemed that night.

The dignity and grace of developed womanhood were hers, and something more—something of her pride and of the indomitable courage of her heart was suggested in her high and spirited carriage, bodied forth in the sweet resolution of her chin—that never drooped even in fatigue; in the unfathomable depths of her unfaltering eyes—that never fell before any man's; in the rare and perfect contour of her forehead—broad and thoughtful beneath the shimmer of gold, and of a fine whiteness.

So I sat and gazed throughout the length of that all-too-short act. When the curtain fell, I drew a long and deep breath; the moment to which I had been looking forward for two years was near at hand; I confidently expected to visit that box during the intermission.

But, as Sevrance and I rose and fought our way out, I happened again to glance upward. She had turned and was looking straight toward us.

Our eyes met, and I stopped dead in the aisle. Vaguely I was aware that Sevrance was tugging at my arm and counseling me not to be an abandoned fool, warning me that everyone was remarking my emotion.

But I had caught the flash of welcome in her eyes —an incredulous light of surprise and—pleasure. She nodded, and I knew that she had not forgotten me.

At that instant—all of this happened more swiftly than I can tell it—a man entered the box. The light

fell full upon his dark, immobile features; and I knew Captain von Holzborn. He was, of course, in full evening dress, and I put my teeth together, realizing the magnitude of my undertaking, since I proposed to win the woman's heart from this man of splendid gifts. He was far too good looking for my peace of mind.

Von Holzborn bent forward, his lips moving. Julia turned, with a quickly repressed start of surprise. Almost immediately she rose, gathering up her wraps, of which the Prussian at once relieved her. Another occupant of the box, whom I had scarcely noticed, also arose; there was an air of unexpected departure about the party.

Sevrance hurried me up the aisle. In the promenade he was for taking me to task for making an exhibition of myself, but I cut him off with a hurried explanation, the gist of which was that Lady Herbert was leaving, and that I had had no word with her.

It was almost a hopeless undertaking, and possibly not conceived in the best of taste—to get that word with her. As it turned out, I was denied it. I saw her descending the grand staircase in company with her *fiancé* and the elder woman, and again she smiled and bowed.

Sevrance and I stood helpless, cut off by a stream of people surging out into the lobby. As soon as it was possible we pushed through and gained the sidewalk, where I had insanely hoped we would find them awaiting us. But we were just in time to hear the slam of their carriage door and to see the vehicle disappear into the fog.

I broke down and indulged in profanity. Sevrance stood aside and mocked me.

"What do you expect?" demanded he: "That the world will be ordered according to your wishes? Be calm, young 'un, and keep your head."

"Tony," I cried, "what does it mean?"

"What does what mean?" he asked.

His humor cooled me a trifle. "Their sudden departure," I explained. "That was Von Holzborn's doing. Do you think he suspects——?"

"How the deuce should I know, Gordon? He's quite capable of thinking for himself, of putting two and two together—and one can't just say how much Lady Herbert may have told him."

I grunted disconsolately.

"There's plenty of time," he comforted me. "Very likely they had a late engagement—a reception or a dance. Besides, what wonderful fascinations you must believe you possess—that Von Holzborn should become so promptly jealous of you!"

"Oh, go to the devil!"

"In my own good time," he returned resentlessly. "I'm in no haste. For my part, I would prefer to eat a grilled bone than to be the source thereof, just now. What do you say? Feeling peckish?"

"No," said I sullenly.

"Moreover," he continued, in a tone of calm and logical argument, "it grows evident that you do not know the spirit of your ladylove. It's hardly supposable that she would permit the Prussian to order her around. Come on over to the club."

But in my heart I knew that he was wrong—that if not my own appearance on the scene, then something of greater moment was to be held accountable for that

sudden and evidently unexpected departure from the theater.

Over this thought, thoroughly convinced of its truth, I gloomed for the rest of the evening; Sevrance exerted himself in vain to rouse me. Nor did I find any relief—save in sleep—until the following morning, when Sevrance, looking over his mail at the breakfast table, tossed me a square, white envelope, addressed to me in his care, in a hand that I knew only too well.

It was such a letter as I might have expected—a note, all too brief, charming and tersely pertinent:

DEAR MR. TRAILL: I am so sorry I missed speaking to you last night, and I am all anxiety to have a good, long talk with you. Won't you come to tea this afternoon? Mrs. Morchester and I will be at home only to you and Mr. Sevrance.

Faithfully,

JULIA HERBERT.

I looked up to find Sevrance's eye upon me.

"Who is Mrs. Morchester?" I inquired, with deceptive nonchalance.

"Lady Herbert's companion," he returned; "you saw them together last night."

"We are asked to call this afternoon—for tea."

"Now will you believe me?"

"I'm not satisfied—I won't be till I see her face to face."

Somehow I worried through that interminable day. The fog had lifted and we had a clear and brilliant sky, when, at length, we set forth—a propitious sign, Sevrance assured me. I tried to believe it, but the truth is that a presentiment of disappointment kept me com-

pany. I could not rid my mind of the sinister impression caused by Von Holzborn—who, I had to admit, in all likelihood was innocent enough.

A cab whirled us to that house from which De Netze had staggered with the support of his would-be assassins —the house of my beloved, that I had so nearly entered the night before the last. Sevrance and I together mounted the steps, and confronted the gorgeous flunky from whose glare I had fled so precipitately.

To this day I believe the fellow recognized me and took a low-lived joy in the business. He received our cards with a supercilious air, which would have been worth a fabulous salary per annum to a head waiter back in little old New York.

"Lady 'Erbert," he said heavily, staring fixedly and disapprovingly at me with his fishy eyes, "is not at 'ome."

"Mrs. Morchester, then?" Sevrance suggested.

"Mrs. Morchester is halso hout."

In my disappointment and chagrin I asked thoughtlessly:

"She will return when?"

"Hit is himpossible to say, sir," he said stiffly, looking straight through me, "when Lady 'Erbert will return. She 'as left town, sir."

Sevrance attempted to comfort me throughout that gloomy homeward ride.

"It is inexplicable," he admitted, "just now. But wait. There will be an explanation."

I shook my head. "I shan't hear until it is too late," I prophesied. "Von Holzborn suspects. This is his hand."

"Twaddle!" declared Sevrance.

He failed to convince me, but in a way he was right. When we had reached Sevrance's rooms in Lord's Chambers, we found news of a sort awaiting us. Grady, Sevrance's man, an undersized, alert, and good-natured Irish boy, opened the door for us.

"Any letters?" Sevrance demanded instantly.

"One, sor," said the man. "But not f'r yer honor, sor. 'Tis for Misther Traill."

He beamed benevolently upon me. "'Tis in a la-ady's hand, sor," he volunteered.

"Then give it me instantly!" I cried. "Why the deuce are you standing there, grinning——?"

I suppose our two faces, adorned with similar expressions of impatience, alarmed him. He turned and, in a twinkling, had the note on a salver and was handing it to me with a deferential bending of his shoulders.

"Begging yer honor's pardon, sor," he explained, "but 'twas delivered be a bit of a missinger la-ad thot tuk to his heels and was gone th' minute he'd stuck ut into me hand, sor."

Little cared I how or by what means the note had come. It was sufficient that I held it—even though in fingers that trembled so with emotion that I could scarcely tear the flap.

Already I had recognized Heart's Desire's handwriting in the superscription.

To my dismay, when finally I managed to open it, the inclosure proved to be no more than a handful—or less—of torn paper.

I swore. The best part of the little fragments fluttered from my hands to the rug. Sevrance stared; and

Grady, after a moment of wide-eyed astonishment, got upon his knees and began to scrape the paper together, like the well-trained servant that he was.

"In Heaven's name," Sevrance demanded blankly, "what does that mean?"

"You've your question for your pains," I told him sourly.

"But surely—" He paused. "Hold on!" he exclaimed. "There's a chance— Grady, give me those papers!"

"What—" I began.

"The note has been torn," explained Sevrance irritably. "*I* don't know why, you idiot! But we'll piece it together and——"

He bent over the study table, sorting the pieces out under the glow of the student's lamp, his eyes intent. I peered over his shoulder in a fever of anxiety.

It was a tedious task. That double sheet of note paper had been torn infinitesimally fine. Many of the fragments were naturally quite blank; indeed, the majority were so. Many simply would not fit in—and all such were blank. Others appeared to be missing, nor could the utmost ingenuity at our command supply the lost words.

But in the end, after a half hour's hard and exasperatingly slow work, we were able, with some difficulty, to make out the following message—the whole beneath the family crest and town address of Lady Herbert:

"Gordon, I need you. I shan't be . . . . . when you call . . . . . afternoon. I am com . . ed to . . . . . at once and cannot foreca . . . . day of my . . . . It . . . . . my wil . . I feel as if . . . . . helpless in this . . . . . but I

count upon you who . . . . . zborn's safety. . . . Come to me, then, at once if ever you . . . . . I shall be at . . . . "

That was all. The final words were evidently written in unusual haste, and the last few were almost illegible, the ultimate "at" being a mere scrawl, ending in a long dash, as though the pen had been dashed hurriedly across the paper.

I threw myself, bewildered and disgruntled, into a chair; Sevrance turned and faced me, his calm a trifle less assured than was his wont.

"Good Lord, my dear boy!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "What a—an enigma!"

"Enigma!" I cried angrily. "Enigma be damned!" I rose and walked the length of the room. "She mentioned his name," I mused aloud. A gust of rage took me by the throat. "He's responsible for this!" I cried.

"Who, may I ask?"

"That damned Prussian pig!"

"Traill," commented Sevrance dispassionately, his assurance restored, "you've a marvelous faculty for pithy characterization!"

CHAPTER VII

A WOMAN AND THE TELEPHONE

Disconsolately I threw myself into a chair. Sevrance began one of his meditative walks up and down the room—hands clasped behind back, head bowed, brows thoughtful, lips tight, legs swinging methodically, fifteen steps one way, wheeling on the heel, fifteen steps back again.

The monotony of his measured footfalls wore upon my nerves. I was sick at heart and wanted comforting —yearned for the sound of a friendly voice and the empty solace of hollowly optimistic phrases. When I had endured the silence as long as I could, I snapped at my friend:

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, say something!"

Sevrance paused by the window; I did not look up, but knew that his eyes were upon me.

He whistled softly. "Thunder!" he complied cheerfully, and recommenced his constitutional.

I restrained an impulse to throw something at him, and fell into a deep and despondent mood, pondering vainly the mystery of this latest happening.

What the devil could it all mean, anyhow?

I was ready to accept the unusual incidents attending upon my arrival in London as a part of a drama wherein I was no more than a supernumerary—an in-

significant factor, making my entrance and my exit both in one scene.

That, then, I was ready to drop—to relegate to the back of my mind as something to be remembered with interest as an extraordinary adventure, but not calling for prolonged study in order to be solved. In short, Monsieur de Netze had been the victim of a gang of Nihilists. Well and good—that was over and done for.

But this affair of Heart's Desire—what did *it* portend? On what grounds could one explain this decidedly out of the ordinary communication?

Up to the very moment of my receipt of Lady Herbert's message, there should have been, to a dispassionate judgment, naught strange or unusual in the affair.

I tried desperately to fit a cause to this development. Why, under what imaginable pressure of circumstances, had she composed that message? What had induced her to tear it into such minute shreds? And what had moved her to reconsider, to gather those fragments of paper together, inclose them in an envelope and dispatch them to me by messenger?

Why, finally, had she not rewritten her note? It had been as baffling as a clever cipher. Purposely so?

I harried my brain with whys and wherefores until I was nigh frantic; night closed down upon London town while we—Sevrance and I—endeavored to fathom the unheard of; yet we were scarcely aware of the flight of time.

Sevrance, I know, maintained his incessant tramp, tramp, tramp, up and down, up and down, without pause or word. I hardly moved, I suppose, for an hour or more.

My head rang with the opening words of that exasperating appeal:

"*Gordon, I need you! Gordon, I need you! Gordon, I need you!*"

I seemed to hear her sweet tones, as I remembered them; her deep and vibrant contralto with the proud and imperious note that I knew so well, that thrilled me then as it ever had thrilled me, as it never has ceased to move me:

"*Gordon, I need you!*"

Why? I demanded. What conceivable peril menaced her? What *could* menace Lady Herbert, widow of Sir Henry Herbert, K.C.S.I., mistress of Saltacres in Lincolnshire, mistress of millions in her own right, acknowledged queen of her own court in the social world of England—my Heart's Desire? What could even touch her, wring from her an appeal for aid so moving and so enigmatic?

It was a futile speculation wherein we two indulged ourselves—I selfishly wrapped up in the sense of my desolation, holding myself robbed of the woman who had plighted her troth to another; Sevrance, unselfishly, as always—that true man!—since he himself loved her not one whit less reverently than I, and thrice as nobly and hopelessly as either Von Holzborn or myself!

At length Sevrance paused, and, without troubling to summon Grady, lighted the lamps. Startled from my abstraction by the sputter of the matches and the growing glow of the illumination, I looked up, to find him considering me with gravely sympathetic eyes.

"Well?" I said, fancying that I saw an air of hope in his manner. "You think——?"

"I think?" He laughed derisively. "*I* think? Faith, Traill, I'm beyond thinking! I am for action——"

"Action?" I rose, already enlivened by the thought. "How? What do you propose?"

He permitted his hands to fall limply by his sides. "There are a dozen things that we might do," said he slowly.

"For instance——?"

"We might take a cab and make a little tour of inspection, aiming to discover if, surely, Lady Herbert has left London so suddenly and unceremoniously."

Very likely I stared at him as if he had offered to relieve me of my watch and chain, so astounding did I find this proposition, at once so simple, feasible, and sensible.

"Let us go, then!" I agreed, catching up hat and overcoat and starting for the door impetuously. But halfway I paused, irresolute, noticing that Sevrance betrayed none of my suddenly awakened animation and enthusiasm.

"But—where—?" I faltered, beginning to conceive of the difficulties. "And—to what purpose? Her letter—surely that is enough. She says——"

"In itself it might be proof of the very reverse," he said absent-mindedly.

"How?" I persisted blankly.

"Why," he explained; "suppose yourself in Lady Herbert's position. She finds herself about to leave town unexpectedly. She summons a messenger and tells her maid that she will have a note ready for delivery in a few moments. She begins to write, gets half through

her note of apology, when something happens to make her alter her determination. Slowly—thoughtfully, doubtless—she tears the first note up, meditating another, and abstractedly tucks the scraps into the envelope already addressed. She is called away for a moment. The maid, finding the addressed envelope, seals and gives it to the messenger—and so it reaches you."

"But—" I stammered, appalled by the simplicity of this explanation. A breath of hope invigorated me. After all, this gloomy edifice of mystery and misery which I had so laboriously erected on an insufficient foundation of misunderstanding, might crumble into nothingness, under the analysis of common sense, like the unsubstantial fabric of a dream, at the first ray of light.

"Why, you're right!" I conceded hopefully.

But Sevrance shook his head. "No—I am wrong," he said dully.

"What——?"

"I had forgotten entirely her first words: 'Gordon, I need you.' She would not have written that without cause. Whatever her motive, at least we can be sure that it existed at the time. She needed your arm—*your* arm, you beggar, not Von Holzborn's—to support and shield her in time of tribulation—and whether or not that time has passed, who can say?"

"At least we can try to discover. You proposed to go out—I don't know whither——"

"I do," said Sevrance decidedly. "If Lady Herbert is in town this day, or has left it, we'll discover—Grady, my hat!"

"Yis, yer honor!"

The valet's response came from the adjoining room, dulled by the intervening door. A moment later he opened it briskly, and was about to come in when, shrill and clear, there sounded the imperative clamor of a bell.

"Th' tillyfun—" I heard Grady begin.

But I pushed him aside and dashed into the farther apartment, toward the telephone instrument which adorned one wall. I know not by what mental process, but it seemed as if I was made intuitively aware that some fresh development in this coil of mystery was at hand. The bell had not time to cease its whirring vibration, the sound of it was still loud in the air, when I lifted the receiver from the hook and put it to my ear.

Instinctively I was aware that Sevrance had followed me, treading on tiptoe, the better to avoid disturbing me. He was close by my shoulder when the reply to my first —I fear hoarse and discordant—"Hello!" sounded along the wire.

The words, when they came, were entirely negative in value and dashing to my hopes—a chill request from central, I suppose, for Sevrance's 'phone number. I gave it, trembling with impatience, and was told to wait a minute.

A tremulous humming rang in my ears during a wait that seemed interminably long. I stood almost breathless, divided between hope and a fear that this message, which my imagination, overexcited, had magnified into an imminent event of importance, should turn out to be nothing more than a commonplace communication from one of Sevrance's wide circle of acquaintances.

Abruptly I seemed to be aware of a whisper—a stage

whisper, if I may so describe it—a hushed and guarded repetition of my name, carrying with it an effect of intense strain:

"Mr. Traill? Mr. Traill?"

"Yes—yes!" I well-nigh shouted.

"Ah—" The exclamation seemed hardly more than a sigh, a faint and sensitive sigh, as of relief.

A silence followed, wherein I fancied I caught a sound as of hurried but subdued breathing—a soft and distant sibilance which might reasonably enough have been charged to the singing of the wires.

My mind seemed to attempt an exploration of the unknown and indeterminate distances of that wire, as though my mental vision were feebly and tentatively projected along that slender line of communication, out through the blacknesses of the night, seeking the light at the further station, whence came the call. I waited in an agony, muttering over and over again, almost inaudibly: "Well? Well? Well?"

Finally there came one word—hushed—electrifying —"Gordon!" and I was half staggered by the recognition of that voice whose appeal, "Gordon, I need you!" had seemed so clearly audible to me during the past two hours.

"Yes?" I cried. "Yes? Go on—Julia, Julia!"

Suddenly there was a change. I seem now to see the woman, the dear lady of my heart's desire, straighten herself up and nerve herself for that subtle and perilous ruse. Her words came clearly, with a cool and business-like intonation. I hearkened without daring to reply.

"Hello! Hello! Is this Roguet et Compagnie? . . . This is Lady Herbert. . . . Yes, Lady Herbert.

"'Gordon! . . . Hello! Hello! Is this Roguet et Compagnie?'"

I wish to speak at once with Monsieur Roguet. . . . At the 'phone, you say? Very well. . . . I cannot come for the fittings to-morrow. I am leaving town suddenly and shall not return for several weeks. . . ."

Then followed a brief pause. I found no words. I seemed stricken dumb with astonishment. She resumed the one-sided conversation as though she had been listening with approval to some response.

"Yes. Very well. . . . Yes, immediately, to be gone several weeks. . . . Finish the gowns without more fittings and send them as soon as possible to Saltacres. . . . Yes, the black jet first of all. . . . Good day, monsieur, good day."

There followed a sharp click; then silence, profound and impenetrable. I put my fingers to the bell—and hesitated. My intent had been to ring furiously, to demand an instant connection with the other station. But a second's reflection convinced me that such a course would be perilous; I was slowly quickening to the suspicion, nay, the knowledge, that the message to the dressmaker, "Monsieur Roguet," was a mere feint to mask Julia's purpose to inform me of her future whereabouts.

And so I did not ring; but for some reason, while weighing these considerations, I clung to that receiver as a drowning man clings to a straw. I know not what I expected, but somehow I felt that the end of the little passage was not yet; instinctively I was waiting for some further word.

For several seconds the silence was maintained unbroken, and then, without warning, there came a prolonged buzzing of the magnets, and a woman's voice, harsh with the Cockney accent:

"Are yer through?"

That was Central speaking, beyond doubt. I refrained from replying, and was rewarded. Immediately there came another *brrrrr*—one could almost see the impatience of him who rang—and as distinctly as though I stood by the man's elbow I heard Von Holzborn's crisp, heavy tones.

"Who is that?" he demanded brusquely. "What do you want?"

But Central had apparently considered the connection still in force, and turned to other business. At any rate, she did not respond, and you may be sure that I was careful not to break the silence.

I heard Von Holzborn swear beneath his breath in German, and then he repeated his inquiry, this time in a tone tinged with unmistakable impatience and irritation.

"Who is there, I say? Why do not you answer?"

I did not inform him. Evidently he concluded to give up an unprofitable inquiry. His receiver went into the hook with a crash, and I turned away and faced Sevrance, whose manifest impatience I endeavored to allay with a concise account of what had passed back and forth upon that wire. He followed me with strained interest, his eye at first clouding, then lightening as he conceived the acuteness of Lady Herbert's stratagem. When I had concluded, he threw back his head with a short, brisk laugh.

"Clever!" he commended. "Clever, you beggar! Who but she would have thought of it! Oh, I can see it all—all, as plainly as though I had been there: Julia at the 'phone, mad with anxiety to get word

to you, fearful every instant of Holzborn's return. For he would have been out, somewhere, would he not?"

I nodded.

"And then, just as she musters up courage to speak, he comes back, finds her at the instrument, and she has the cleverness, the ingenuity, the very audacity, to pretend that she is telephoning her tailor! Man——"

He paused. His face lengthened, his eyes becoming again shadowed. And I comprehended the cause. "Clever," he murmured abstractedly, "clever!"

"Clever—I grant you. But what does it mean, Sevrance? Why should she be forced to such subterfuge? What right has Von Holzborn, her *fiancé* though he be, to dictate whether or not she shall inform me of her destination?"

Sevrance shook his head, his eyes on the floor.

"Where were they," I demanded hotly, "that she dared not use the 'phone without fear of interruption? In London?"

"They must have been—or near it," he muttered.

"But we were told to-day that Lady Herbert had left town."

Sevrance elevated his brows and his shoulders hopelessly. "We were told!" he commented bitterly. "We have been *told* everything. Traill—" He hesitated, eying me, I saw, without knowing where he looked. "Traill, there's the devil to pay somewhere."

"I know that—and his name is——"

"Von Holzborn."

"It would give me great gratification to settle his account," I affirmed. "God! I'd give my right hand

to know the ins and outs of this infernal nightmare business!"

By way of reply, Sevrance turned abruptly to the telephone, ringing up. I stood wondering, but only to discover that he was attempting to get from Central the number with which we had recently been connected. His efforts, however, were fruitless, although he resorted to every imaginable expedient to gain his end.

After about fifteen minutes of it, he gave it up in disgust.

"It's no go," he conceded; "a beastly nuisance!"

The thing was preying on his mind as upon mine; what three hours before had seemed possibly insignificant now loomed before us with all the aspect of some monstrous infamy. He took a turn up and down the room, coming to a halt before me.

"At least we know where to look for her—from her own lips—Saltacres."

"The Herbert estate in Lincolnshire?"

He nodded. "That is much, Gordon. If she needs you there, she needs me. We'll go, won't we, old chap—together?"

I clasped his hand, but he broke away, calling to Grady for his hat.

"What now?"

"I'm off," he said, breathless with an inspiration.

"Where to?"

"God knows," he returned simply. "I'm going to scour this town for Julia, for Von Holzborn, for De Netze. If I find her, if it's true that she is still in town—all well and good. But if I find one only—either one of them——"

He stopped abruptly, his handsome features overcast with an ugly, threatening look. We had passed on into the outer room; I quietly took up my own hat and coat. Grady was assisting Sevrance with his own.

"No, you don't," commanded Sevrance, noting my action.

"I'm going with you," I asserted firmly.

"What for, Gordon?" he expostulated. "Don't be an ass, old chap. There won't be any—any trouble, you know. Let me alone—let me play a lone hand just now. I think—I'm very sure I can find out something if you will only bide quiet here."

"Not by a long sight——"

"There may come another message," he suggested.

The possibility made me falter in my determination to accompany him and keep him out of trouble; I knew Sevrance's quick temper, carefully concealed though it lay beneath his affectation of British *insouciance*, and it was not without reason that I feared an outbreak, should he succeed in his search and come upon either Prussian or Russian—far fetched as seemed the consideration of either contingency.

He saw his advantage and followed it up.

"You had best stay," said he. "If she should wire you for aid at once——"

"I'll stay," I informed him, "upon one condition: you are to keep your temper and"—I glanced at my watch; it was near seven—"be back by ten at the latest."

"I agree," he said; and we shook hands upon it. In another moment he was gone, taking the staircase three

and four steps at a time if the noise of his descent counted for anything.

And at once I began to regret my irresolution, my weakness. I saw clearly that I should have persisted, that I should have gone with him at all hazards.

There were before me three mortal hours of solitude, which I must endure with patience, lashed though I was by the most maddening apprehensions, picturing to myself, as I must inevitably, a thousand situations, each more terrible than its predecessor, in which my Heart's Desire figured helpless, imperiled, needing the protection of the man who would lay down his life for her!

One fact bulked clear and obvious above all others —that we were shortly to undertake a journey to Lincolnshire, barring an inconceivable righting of affairs. I summoned Grady and directed him to go immediately, discover on what railroad lay the nearest station to Saltacres, and to procure a first-class compartment on the earliest convenient train.

Alone I set madly to work stuffing a few necessary articles of clothing into our suit cases. I dare say I made a sad, hopeless mess of the job—bungled it atrociously. I know that when Grady returned he promptly and very solemnly dumped everything out of both cases and repacked them according to his own conception of the fitness of things.

But long ere that occurred I was to suffer an interruption that put a prompt period to this manifestation of my energies. In the midst of it all, when I had about accomplished a complete and satisfactory dismantling of Sevrance's bedroom and had the entire contents, not only of my trunks, but of his bureau drawers distributed

helter-skelter about the floor, I heard the pounding of heavy feet upon the stairway.

I waited, listening. Could this be Sevrance returning? Or Grady? It seemed that neither had been gone more than fifteen minutes, but my watch showed me that it was eight-thirty. It was possible. I went out into the study, carefully closing the bedroom door behind me—a precaution for which I was afterwards grateful.

The footsteps drew near slowly, steadily, purposefully; I concluded that one of the tenants of the chambers above was returning home; neither my host nor his man would have shown such deliberation.

By the door, however, there was a pause, and then, loudly, and as if with intent to indicate an unhurried mood, three sharp raps upon the panels.

I flung open the door.

Captain Kurd von Holzborn entered calmly, smiling courteously the while he removed his gloves and glanced quickly about the room.

CHAPTER VIII

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BROKEN OFF

He gave me a pleasant good evening with perfect *nonchalance*. I stammered out a confused and breathless response, which, however, I managed to cover by slamming the door smartly.

My mind was a whirl of conflicting thoughts as I turned, but out of them one consideration stood prominent: I must conduct myself with a coolness and a composure in no degree inferior to the captain's.

Whatever his purpose with me, whatever the motive which had inspired this visit, which only omniscience could have foreseen and provided against, I must not show the least evidence of my amazement; therein lay the only weak spot in my armor; and, somehow, I felt that this meeting was to be of the nature of a duel between us—a duel of wits, if nothing more.

Certainly Von Holzborn had not come unprompted by ulterior motive; it was not conceivable that this was a merely friendly call. He had his point to make, his surmise to prove; that was beyond doubt.

It remained for me to keep him as completely in the dark, concerning what he wished to know, as lay within my power—and I prided myself that my wits would prove as nimble as the Prussian's.

At the same time I was to find out for myself and for Sevrance upon what manner of devilment Von Holz-

born was engaged, and how it affected the woman whom I loved. I had need of all my diplomacy and discretion for an undertaking so essentially delicate—to worm from this self-contained nature the truth and simultaneously permit him to guess nothing of our suspicions, our plans, or our knowledge.

He put himself in the middle of the room, where he stood squarely, as was his wont, with his back to the light, his face shadowed—a temporary advantage. But I managed to meet his hard and expressionless eyes with a gaze as frank and open, if colored with polite surprise, as I could have desired; or so I prided myself.

At any rate, he seemed satisfied, and knowing that the advantage of the light was untenable for long, relinquished it without any maneuverings, and dropped his heavy, solid body into an armchair, sighing with relief—as a weary man might sigh.

In this position the glare of lamplight was full upon his face; another's had been an open book to a reader of physiognomies; Von Holzborn's was as blank as a freshly laundered sheet, if not of the same hue. To cover my lack of calmness and to keep my face turned from him, I busied myself about the room, finding cigars and cigarettes, during his opening remarks.

"Mr. Sevrance?" he inquired blandly. "He is not in?"

"No," I told him frankly; "I am alone."

"But he will return——"

I saw no reason for withholding the truth.

"As a matter of fact," I replied, "I don't know when he will get home. He didn't say—to me, at least. And Grady also is out."

"I am sorry. I would have liked a word with him. We have become quite friendly—Mr. Sevrance and myself, Mr. Traill."

"So he has indicated. A cigar? Or a cigarette?" I offered the boxes.

He accepted an Havana, refusing an immediate light, however.

"After all," he said, watching me keenly, "it is perhaps as well. My errand, to be candid, is more with you than with Mr. Sevrance."

"Yes?"

I had trimmed the end of a cigar, and now I bent over the lamp, lighting the tobacco with the heat from the chimney, so that he did not learn much from my expression. An instant later, when I was seated facing him, I had the smoke for a mask, and was well content.

"Yes," he said precisely, speaking with deliberation and choosing his words. "I am so fortunate as to be the bearer of a message to you, sir." He bent forward, linking his fingers, his elbows resting upon the arms of the chair, a slight smile softening the hard contour of his lips. "From a lady," he added slowly.

"I can imagine from whom, then," I laughed easily. "You see, so far as I know, we have but one feminine acquaintance in common."

"To be sure," he assented gravely. "We are both favored of fortune."

"Decidedly," I agreed; "and yet, you deserve all the congratulations, Captain."

"And not Lady Herbert?" He laughed shortly, but not unamiably, to show that he had purposely misinterpreted my remark, and continued: "And so, in my

capacity as the betrothed of Lady Herbert, you will, I conclude, be agreeable to receive me as her envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary?"

"I am sure that Lady Herbert could not have chosen a more accomplished diplomatist for the purpose."

He had the grace not to show his annoyance. Indeed, he bowed slightly, by way of thanks for this double-edged compliment.

"I am, then, instructed to approach you with an apology," he went on, maintaining his air of courteous banter. "Lady Herbert has tried twice to-day to get into communication with you, but——"

His eyes were like a basilisk's—pitiless; I believe I endured their searching scrutiny unmoved.

"Indeed?" said I politely.

"Both by letter and by telephone," he affirmed.

"Why, that is odd!" I parried.

"You received the note, of course?"

"The note?" I stared him full in the eye, shaking my head. "Unless," I qualified, "a note may have come in my absence and Grady have forgotten. I must ask him."

"The telephone, then?"

"At what hour?"

He named, with passable exactness, the time when Lady Herbert had telephoned "Monsieur Roguet."

"We were all at home at that hour," I said; "but I am sure that the bell did not ring."

This was, of course, a full-winged lie; but I consoled myself with the thought that I was unlikely to be detected in it. It would be a difficult thing to

prove positively that the telephone had been in use that day.

"There was, I believe, some trouble," Holzborn lied, in his turn. "Central did not seem to be able to get the number. But, of course, I might have known that, since had you received the message, my errand would be superfluous."

He dropped the air of gentle raillery and became quite serious, eying me with a calculating glance. I returned the look inquiringly, and contained myself until he spoke.

"Mr. Traill," he said, after a short pause, "I am going to repose a confidence in you. May I ask that you let it go no farther than Mr. Sevrance?"

I showed evidences of being startled.

"Is it necessary?" I protested. "Is it serious?"

"A matter of life and death," he stated gravely.

"If you consider it safe, necessary—why, I shall not violate your confidence; that is, I must warn you, unless it affects the interests of my friends."

"It does, but in the other way; and, since you stumbled upon a part of the business, Mr. Traill, you may as well know the rest of it."

"I am all attention; you refer to Monsieur de Netze?"

"Exactly." He lighted his cigar with care.

"I may inform you that we are great friends, Netze and I," he continued. "And, although I am a servant of the German Empire, I feel it my duty to be of what assistance I may, as a stanch friend, to Monsieur de Netze. It is true, he serves another country, but——"

"I comprehend."

"Now his life is in danger—grave danger. He was all but assassinated, as you know. He is under constant surveillance by the assassins; they may, at any moment, accomplish their design. They are determined, cruel, merciless. Unless he can be conveyed out of England, and to a place wherein he may remain in hiding for a time—he is as good as dead at this moment."

"That," I agreed, with sympathy, "*is* unpleasant."

"I have been put to it to find a way to help him—and I have found it, Mr. Traill. Lady Herbert has a yacht—a steam vessel, I believe—the *Myosotis*, at Portsmouth. She has been kind enough to offer us the use of this yacht. It is ready to go into commission at an instant's notice, and—and we sail to-morrow morning."

He stopped, noting the effect upon me. I am afraid that I seemed unimpressed. Indeed, I did not believe the man, and I failed to divine whither his falsehoods tended.

"Lady Herbert and Mrs. Morchester are already on their way to Portsmouth," he went on. "Netze and I"—he smiled deprecatingly—"will follow by another route, and, to tell the melodramatic truth, in disguise."

"I can appreciate the advisability," said I soberly.

"And that," he concluded with an air of relief, "is why Lady Herbert was unable to receive you at tea this afternoon."

"Oh," I protested, "I should not for an instant consider myself slighted, under the circumstances. I am not, indeed, of sufficient importance——"

"You underestimate your value as an old friend of my *fiancée*," he explained; "Lady Herbert—Julia, if I may call her so, to you—is more than anxious to see

you, to renew old associations, Mr. Traill. She would not have you consider her wanting in courtesy for a moment."

"I hold myself honored," I said stiffly. "Seriously, I am distressed to think that you thought it a matter of such importance that you left Monsieur de Netze unguarded even for an instant, to offer me this explanation—which was not at all essential, I assure you. Besides, I shall have the honor of seeing Lady Herbert herself within a day or two, I presume?"

He possessed an admirable control. I prided myself that I had touched him twice, and smartly, pricked twice through the tissue of falsehood with which he sought to bewilder me. But he had not shown a sign of discomfiture. To the contrary, he was ready with a smile, as he rose, evidently to take his departure.

"My friend is in good hands for the time being," he countered. "And the matter was not to be passed over lightly in our opinion—Julia's and mine." And there he touched me neatly! "Lady Herbert—I regret to disappoint you—will not return for several weeks. She—accompanies us."

For a moment he had managed to hoodwink me, for a moment to delude me into believing his absurd yarn; and now, when I considered that he was proposing to take a young, beautiful, and sensitive woman into such dangers as dogging the footsteps of a Russian spy—I shuddered and lost complete control of my temper. I know that I flushed angrily under his superior, German, intensely impertinent stare.

"Lady Herbert," I said, "is, of course, her own mistress; but I confess I cannot comprehend with what

motive you expose her to the perils of your undertaking."

He looked me over with a smile of faint, indulgent amusement that set my blood boiling.

"It is hard, sometimes, to comprehend. Lady Herbert serves as a shield, Mr. Traill. The *Myosotis*, going into commission to convey its owner, will not be an object of suspicion."

"You hide behind a woman's skirts, eh?" The words were out before I knew it. "It is not our custom in America—nor in England, sir!"

He took up his hat and adjusted it carefully, in silence, staring at me with that exasperating and essentially Prussian insolence.

"Lady Herbert," he said, at length, with biting emphasis, "is not accountable to you, Mr. Traill, for her actions. Nor, I may venture to suggest, am I."

By an effort I managed to approximate his aplomb.

"Assuredly not—at present," I conceded steadily; "but you are to understand, Captain von Holzborn, that if one hair of Lady Herbert's head is harmed through this venture of yours, you will be held accountable by and to me."

"On what grounds?" he suggested mildly.

His words, his manner should have crushed me; they succeeded only in making me the more angry.

"On grounds of my own assumption, if on no other," I retorted. "We Americans are not disposed to look calmly on and see our women deluded by cowards and adventurers."

The fat was already in the fire; I saw no harm in forcing the issue between this Prussian mercenary and

myself. In a calmer moment, perhaps, I should have spoken differently; I can't say now. But at the time I was quite ready to show him my hand—the hand of an open enemy.

He received the epithets without flinching; not a muscle of his face moved. Only I fancied that his eyes grew yet more impenetrable and opaque; my furious glances seemed to shatter themselves against their impassive hostility.

Very quietly he buttoned his coat about him; not until the operation was concluded did he speak. Then:

"So that is the way you feel about it, eh?" said he. "Mr. Traill, permit me to assure you that, at another time, when I am not bound to more serious issues, I shall take great pleasure in forcing you to retract those words. In the meantime——"

"I am at your service whenever you are—disengaged," I said coldly.

"In the meantime," he repeated, stooping and taking up his stick. For an instant I fancied that he thought to strike me; it was a large and heavy cane, of tough wood. Abruptly, however, he clasped it with both hands, about six inches apart, near its middle. Without any apparent exertion he bore upon the stick with either hand; there was a sharp crack, and it splintered and broke. Von Holzborn dropped the halves to the floor.

"Just so," he said slowly, "I could break you in two, with my bare hands—just so. You must bear in mind that I am a strong man—and I have no love for you. I should advise you to keep out of my path; it is not to be crossed with impunity—by you."

I laughed in his face. "That mountebank trick has been worn threadbare, on the stage and in novels," I told him amusedly. "Let me show you."

Fortunately I am not undeveloped in a muscular way; I used to hold a record or two, for one thing and another in athletics, before a younger generation wrested those trophies from me.

I picked up the two sticks, put them together, broke them, and offered him the fragments. "Your cane, sir," said I with mock respect. "And a good evening."

He waited perhaps half a minute, his face livid—the first indication of human emotion I had ever noted in the man; then in silence he brushed past me and was gone, tramping heavily down the staircase and across the courtyard.

CHAPTER IX

THE SPIRIT OF KNIGHT-ERRANTRY

PROMPT to his word, Sevrance was back at ten. Grady had forestalled his arrival by an hour or so, and was even then busy, as I have indicated, with the packing of our luggage in the adjoining bedroom.

A compartment had been engaged on the train leaving King's Cross at about nine the following morning. Altogether, the journey was to occupy something less than six hours. We planned to arrive at Saltsea Regis, a fishing hamlet and the nearest station to the Herbert estate, at about three in the afternoon.

My friend came in wearing a long face; he dropped into a chair and grinned feebly at me, breathing hurriedly. He made a gesture expressive of disgust and disappointment.

"I've scoured the town," he complained, "to no purpose—or to little."

"But that little——"

"Nothing to relieve our anxiety," he responded; "though this much is certain: Julia has left town. Holzborn has disappeared since last night; and Netze is either out of town or in hiding."

"How did you find out about Julia?" I demanded with freshening interest.

"Asked her solicitor—a young chap of my acquaintance. He was plainly warned to reticence, but he

loosened up enough to let me know that her ladyship was to be gone for an indeterminate period."

"Saltacres?"

"He would not say. But that's not the worst of it!" Sevrance swore with vexation. "I've been making a few pointed inquiries about our friend, the Herr Captain—damn him!" he added vindictively.

"Go on," I pleaded.

"I have had little talks with several people we both know. The result is that I'm convinced the man's dangerous."

"I suspected as much long ago. But proceed."

"He is posted at all his clubs, and is reported to be deucedly hard pressed for money. His paper is plastered all over town and is falling due and going to protest. The scoundrel!" Sevrance's face darkened. "I find that he has even been to the Jews, borrowing on his prospects as the affianced of her ladyship!"

I was unprepared for that, and, with the memory of the fellow's insolence fresh in my mind, I lost some of my self-possession. Sevrance showed astonishment at the vigor of my remarks, and even deprecated.

"Oh, I say, old chap, it's all very well to be angry with Von Holzborn and to work against him, and all that—but, really——"

To make him comprehend, I had to retail what had just passed between the man and myself. Sevrance listened in silence, tracing a little pattern on the carpet with the ferrule of his stick; when he looked up it was with a set and angry expression.

"That makes it clear enough," he commented thoughtfully. "The man shows himself in his true

colors, as an adventurer, a *chevalier d'industrie,* pure and simple—or not so pure and simple. This Netze business, now, I take it, is nothing more than a subterfuge to get Julia into his power—compromised! The devil!"

"That is right, as far as it goes," said I. "But there's more to it. In the first place, he lies about Portsmouth, the yacht, and all that!"

"Do you think so?" Sevrance looked incredulous.

"Oh, obviously. He did not believe that Julia had managed to communicate with us, and he thought to put us off the track. Their destination is Saltacres. I have no doubt that De Netze is with them, and that it is true enough that he is being stalked by Nihilists. If it is so, Saltacres, from all accounts, is the very place for him to lie in safe hiding."

"Wild and desolate enough—true," said Sevrance.

"Then it's there we'll find them. Plainly, her ladyship suspects something, otherwise she would not have 'phoned. She desires at least our advice. And *she* would not have misled us, Sevrance."

"True," he agreed again. "They will be at Saltacres."

"And so will we," I informed him, adding the time of the up train the next morning.

"You've acted wisely," he told me. "Now I'm for bed. We'll leave details to Grady—he's thoroughly reliable. Shall we take him with us?" he added, after a moment's thinking.

"If you wish."

"He's a good man—brave, loyal, quick-witted."

I had no objection to offer, and thinking Sevrance's

way wisest, I followed his example and went promptly to bed, considering a good night's rest of more value to us than anything else, just at that stage of the proceedings.

At least it furnished me a clear head and a certain clarity of judgment during the next day; I found time and thought it advisable to review the whole affair from start to that moment, during the railway journey, and, although I came upon nothing new, I began to understand the case much more comprehensively than I had theretofore.

I had time, I say, for the reason that conversation between Sevrance and myself was prevented throughout the greater part of the journey by the presence of another passenger in our compartment.

Grady had taken a seat in the second- or third-class carriages—I never could quite fix in my mind the proper degrees of desirability as to the carriages of the English railway systems; I only know that the only comfortable way is to travel first class, and even that is by no means as luxurious as it is at home.

This person, who made a crowd of what Sevrance and I had fondly hoped would be "just company," was a little, shriveled man, apparently of an age verging upon the sixties. He kept well muffled up, and grumbled to himself throughout the entire journey.

Inasmuch as we had practically nothing else to look at, and could hit upon nothing at all to talk about that we dared mention in the presence of outsiders, I retained a very vivid impression of his odd appearance—of his shaggy, iron-gray brows above a thin, hooked nose; of his sunken mouth with thin lips that were never still;

of the gaudy, cheerful comforter which he persisted in wearing tight-knotted about his neck, with the ends hanging down, shawl-like, upon his shoulders; of his bedraggled, black spats; and, particularly, of his hands, which were the hands of the very old—thin and delicately pink, and with a certain glossiness of the skin, as if it were devoid of natural moisture, stretched tight as any drumhead over the bony knuckles.

He had small, vivacious, preternaturally bright eyes, I remember, with which he chose to stare at us by the ten-minute stretch, quite unconscious or else careless of his rudeness. And whenever we spoke together, I remarked that his tremulous old lips would cease moving, that he would unconsciously bend forward a bit.

Naturally, such conduct did not prepossess me in his favor. I catalogued him as an inquisitive and boorish old man, and prepared to dismiss him from my mind when we changed cars at Lincoln, taking a branch-line train which should convey us to Saltsea Regis.

Sevrance, however, was disposed to be as considerate and courteous as most young Britishers are to the aged. I recall that with his own hands he helped the old gentleman out of the carriage, and that he instructed Grady to convey his luggage according to his wishes.

It later appeared that the ancient was bound in the same direction as ourselves; for when our train had drawn in, and we were climbing into an empty compartment, I caught a glimpse of our former fellow-traveler negotiating an entrance to another car farther down the train.

He disappeared from view, and that was the last that I saw of him for some time.

Our train bore us, in a leisurely fashion, through a rolling and sunny countryside, still and wrapt in the immense peacefulness that seems an integral component of an English Sunday afternoon; for it *was* a Sunday, by the way.

Sevrance said something presumably instructive about downs, and I received the information without any astonishment; it was all just precisely as I had been given to understand English downs would look, and I was contented to find them so perfectly patterned to my mental image.

They stretched away deliberately, offering nothing startling to the eye; merely a pleasant and homely sort of country, neatly partitioned off into nice little squares of yellow stubble and green grass and bare, brown earth —much like any one of the illuminated pictures you may see in the children's picture books—the prospect rarely diversified by a patch of woodland, or a blaze of white against the neutral tints, where the flank of a chalk hill lay naked.

That outlook was, for a time, like oil upon the troubled waters of our spirits; it soothed, calmed, and quieted our unrest, even provided us with a tentative sense of incredulity, so impossible did it seem that aught out of the common could happen in a land so staid and respectable.

Through its infinite sobriety our train snorted and smoked and clattered, with a vast, vain air of importance and an assumption of speed entirely illusionary. In fact, it poked; and it was the middle of the afternoon ere it came to a stop in Saltsea Regis—presumably for the simple reason that it could go no farther.

We stepped out into a tepid bath of watery sunshine beneath a high-arching sky. The tang of salt water was in our nostrils, and a long roll of surf sounded in our ears, while a chilly little breeze made overcoats grateful.

Grady bustled about getting our luggage together and making inquiries about lodgings for the night, and finally marched us off down the village's single street.

It wound, in an aimless sort of a fashion, along the top of a low chalk cliff. Some distance ahead I caught sight of our old gentleman of the worn spats and the brilliant neckerchief paddling purposefully along in the wake of one of the village men, who was shouldering his Gladstone bag—presumably for beer money.

Two rows of bright and cheerful little fishermen's cottages bordered the cobbled thoroughfare. Now and again we passed a neat, inconspicuous little shop. Children floundered after us, or ran alongside, wide-mouthed, staring with bright, wide eyes at the intruders; their parents regarded us with a stoical calm. We discovered them a peaceable folk, given to minding their own business by preference.

A walk of some ten minutes brought us to the only inn, "The Rainbow"—appropriate name!—happily situated on the very lip of the cliff, overlooking the broad and troubled expanse of the tempestuous North Sea. The landlord, a taciturn individual, welcomed us without enthusiasm, and provided us with adjoining chambers, containing two small grates about the size, and with the heating capacity, of milk bottles, and incontinently left us to our own devices until supper time.

Grady disposed of our belongings with a rather

chastened, I-told-you-so manner. I gathered that he had disapproved of the expedition from the start-off. Sevrance and I stuck our hands in our pockets and somewhat moodily inspected the sea.

Day was just faltering into twilight, the troubled line of the eastern horizon darkening slowly. Far out, now and again, a single whitecap leaped out of the tossing, slate-colored expanse of waters and nodded to the declining sun. Against the paling sky, gulls wheeled alertly.

Nearer at hand, in a sort of cove inclosed by the low white chalk scarps, perhaps two-score or half a hundred little fishing vessels tossed sedately, like a flock of misshapen and dingy swans, their bare poles describing odd arcs against a lowering background. On the few piers dories rested bottom up, with a curious air of helplessness, like live things deprived of the power of locomotion; and among them men moved slowly, smoking enormous pipes—gnarled and weatherworn types of fisher folk, awkward upon their land legs, jealous of their speech.

Something in that outlook—rather bleak and dreary as it was—affected both Sevrance and myself with a similar sense of depression.

"Nice place," I commented sourly, catching his eye.

"I don't agree with you," he snapped—obviously.

"What do you suppose induced anyone to come down here to live, ever?" I desired to know.

He understood that I was aiming at the deceased Sir Henry Herbert.

"Family estate," he explained tersely. "I suppose the old duffer was born and brought up in this atmos-

phere, and came to call it 'home.' Of one thing I'm certain: our Julia never could endure it. As a matter of fact, I don't believe they spent more than a month or two out of the year at Saltacres."

"You know the place?"

"I have visited there for the shooting once or twice, and passed it frequently on motor runs. The roads hereabout are really not so bad, you know; Sir Henry always used a motor car to travel in, back and forth. . . . I wish I'd thought of it—but it's your fault."

"What is?"

"You had to send Grady to buy tickets per rail, and made me forget my motor. We might as well have traveled up here that way as not—much better, in fact—more quickly and comfortably."

"It would be an advantage," I agreed; "I'm heartily sorry that we haven't it now. It reminds me of reaching Saltacres. How are we to go about it?"

"I spoke to the landlord about a fly," said Sevrance. "He'll have one around before long, I imagine. Or—it's only ten miles—we could walk it," he added, brightening.

Sevrance was looking at me with characteristic eagerness; I presume he expected me to snap him up on the instant. But I said "No, I thank you" so decidedly that he understood I was fixed in my preference for driving, and gave in.

"Suit yourself," he growled sulkily.

"I'm going to," I responded with prompt cheerfulness.

He turned to the windows, exhibiting a pair of misunderstood and abused shoulders, and obstinately

refused to respond to my timid advances until Grady answered a rap at the door and announced the waiting fly.

For my part, so soon as it was definitely settled that there was no uncalled-for walking in prospect, my spirits began to rise; and I was quite contented as we two ran downstairs impatiently enough, and piled into an age-old and ramshackle contraption termed by courtesy a fly—presumably because it didn't, by any stretch of the imagination.

Sevrance took the reins, but did not start until he had questioned the landlord as to our destination. The directions we got were explicit enough; it seemed that we had nothing to do but give the horse (another courtesy title: he was really a snail) his head and let him follow the northerly road.

My friend had another question or two: Had our host heard anything of Lady Herbert's return to Saltacres? Had he noticed any automobiles within the preceding twenty-four hours? To both of which the landlord returned negative replies, couched in a broad Lincolnshire *patois*, which I can't and mercifully shan't attempt to reproduce.

Meanwhile I remarked that our ancient fellow-traveler had cast his lot with ours at the Rainbow. He stood on the doorstep, sniffing the evening air with a red nose, and pricking up his ears with curiosity during Sevrance's little talk with mine host.

Particularly I noticed that he darted a quick, queer glance at us when automobiles were mentioned; one would have fancied him struck with a new idea. He caught my eye upon him, bowed politely, and, turn-

ing, reëntered the hostelry. Sevrance gathered up the reins, clucked to the animal in the shafts, and we moved off.

After a few hundred yards I turned in my seat and looked back. Saltsea Regis had vanished—infolded by the hills wherein it drowsed out its placid existence.

We had rounded a shoulder of the downs and were descending a gentle slope. Before us lay a vast and desolate expanse of downs, bathed in the ruddy light of the setting sun, sinister to view, oppressing the imagination strangely with its effect of infinite, grim distances: a savage and implacable wilderness.

I settled back in my seat, snuggling beneath the lap robes with a little shiver. Presently we had reached the lower level and could see no more than a hundred yards or so of the winding road before us. Even the sea, its nearness made manifest by the sullen growling that filled the air, lay invisible for the greater part of the way. Only once or twice we came out upon a hilltop, or drove near the edge of a low chalk cliff overlooking the waters; and once, if I remember distinctly, the road debouched upon the verge of a long, low, and sandy beach, where our wheels sank deep in the yielding sands, following an ill-defined way between wide reaches of shuddering coarse grasses.

For a couple of hours we traveled on, meeting no one. Night succeeded a lingering twilight, adding to the desolation that surrounded us. Sevrance stopped our beast, got down and lit the lamps, remarking that it seemed more cheerful.

He may have so regarded it; for my part it but accentuated my sensation of loneliness. I conceived a

hatred, then and there, for English downs; a hatred which will stay with me to my dying day, I fancy.

After a while, however, it seemed that we were driving somewhat inland, into a more friendly region. We passed infrequent farmhouses, their position evidenced by glowing windows. Above us the winter stars seemed to increase their cold brilliancy, so that the general configuration of the countryside became more easily discernible.

Sevrance finally broke a wearisome silence.

"We should be near Saltacres," he said. "If I remember the lay of the land, we will come upon the park before many minutes."

"The park!" I ejaculated. "A park in this God-forsaken locality!"

"It's not so beastly over here," he explained; "it's higher, better ground. Saltacres itself is a vast game preserve more than anything else—a protected park, lying between the road and the sea, with the house in the very middle of it. Sir Henry had his private yacht landing on the sea edge of the grounds."

"But how will you know it?"

"Oh," he returned confidently, "the house stands near enough the road for the lights to be visible through the trees—especially at this season of the year, when there is little or no foliage."

"But supposing there are no lights—supposing they are not there?"

"They're there," he was sure.

"But if they haven't arrived——"

"Now, be sensible, Gordon!" His tone was impatient. "Where else would they be? What would they

be doing all this time? We are practically positive they left London yesterday, and they cannot but have arrived before us."

"But if they *didn't* come——"

"They did. Her ladyship said they would."

That was unanswerable. I could only justify myself feebly by a reference to the statement of the landlord of the Rainbow.

"He *said* that no automobile had been seen for weeks——"

"Naturally they would come by a roundabout way, to escape observation. There's a road across the downs from somewhere near Lincoln, for one; or they might have driven up to Grimsby-All-Saints, in the north, and doubled back here."

It seemed more hopeful, in the light of that explanation. I began to feel more assured of finding Heart's Desire at this journey's end. Indeed, I was afire with eagerness and impatience when Sevrance finally drew rein.

"The gates are closed," he announced, "but here's the lodge, at any rate. Jump out—there's a light in the window on the other side."

I leaned forward, peering into the dense darkness of the roadside. At the first I saw nothing at all, but gradually, by dint of straining my eyes, I made out the high arch of an old iron gateway, and, blacker against the general darkness, a blurred smudge that might stand for a small lodge building.

Therefore I obeyed Sevrance and jumped out. He followed me, leading the fly and the thing that had drawn it to a hitching post, which, I concluded, he

found by instinct. But possibly his eyesight was more keen than mine, for when I protested that I saw nothing in any way resembling a light, asserting that there was no such thing there, he contradicted me flatly.

"On the farther side of the lodge," he indicated. I stepped to one side, and was forced to admit that he was right. A faint, yellow radiance did percolate through one window, falling athwart a stretch of dead grass, and, finally, upon a low shrub that grew near by.

"You're right," I conceded unwillingly—hating to acknowledge myself mistaken.

Sevrance did not reply. He strode past me and found a door upon which he knuckled a resounding summons. A voice from within made instant answer:

"Well, well, now, I be a-comin'."

And a moment later a line of light showed beneath the lintel and above the threshold. There was the sound of fingers fumbling with the latch within, and then the door was opened, letting out a flood of radiance.

A gaunt and sallow keeper stood framed in the doorway, holding a kerosene lamp high above his head, blinking out into the darkness. The light fell luridly on his gray head with its strongly cast features, upon his shoulders and the huge and bony hand which held the lamp. But below his figure was invisible, shrouded in obscurity. The effect was remarkable—that of a head and shoulders suspended in mid-air.

He stood silent for an instant, staring blindly.

"Well?" he mouthed irritably. "Who be ye and what d'ye want?"

Sevrance moved into the light. "Good evening,

Thompson," he said. "I'm Mr. Sevrance—you remember me?"

"Lor' bless us, yes! Mr. Sevrance, sir—I know ye well enough, indeed, though 'tis many a long day since I have put eyes upon your face, sir. But I remember ye well. What brings ye this way?"

"I wish to see Lady Herbert, Thompson. She told me in London to meet her here, and I came at once. Will you open the gates and permit——"

"Her leddyship, sir?" said the old keeper incredulously. "Her leddyship be not here, sir. You've been misled."

"Come, come, Thompson," Sevrance remonstrated in a kindly tone. "Don't beat about the bush. I must see Lady Herbert, and that instantly."

"But she be not at Saltacres, Mr. Sevrance, sir," the fellow protested. "No, sir—no; keep your money. It be truth I be tellin'. Why should I lie, sir? Well, sir, if ye insist, I will gladly drink your health, but the solemn truth be that Lady Herbert be not at Saltacres."

"Not at Saltacres!"

There was a profound despair in Sevrance's voice. I stepped to his side, slipping my arm through his.

"She has been delayed, Tony," I said loudly. "She will surely arrive to-morrow, will she not, Thompson?"

Shaking his head, the keeper blinked at me.

"I do not know ye, sir. But ye are with Mr. Sevrance and his friend. So I can tell ye the truth; that if her leddyship be a-comin' to Saltacres, not a soul here knows a word on it."

There was unmistakable sincerity in his tones;

neither of us doubted him an instant longer. Sevrance turned away with a groan.

"By Heaven!" he swore angrily. "Tricked again—duped by that infernal Prussian!"

Von Holzborn had indeed proved more astute than I had thought him—I, who prided myself on my ability to read character! He had taken us in neatly, and there was nothing for it but to acknowledge ourselves beaten.

"Come, Tony," I said gently. "We may as well give it up; we've followed a false scent. Let's get back and sleep on it."

"Sleep!" he cried scornfully. "How can you, with her——"

You may believe that I was as wrathful as he. It maddened me to think with what complacency Holzborn must have been laughing in his sleeve at me during the interview of the past night, when I had boldly asserted what he must have known was a downright falsehood—that I had not heard from Heart's Desire.

"Come," I said again, controlling my voice with difficulty.

But Sevrance jerked his arm away. "Wait!" he cried.

"For what?" I demanded.

He motioned with his hand, enjoining silence. "What?" I began, and held my tongue, for I saw that he was listening.

Loud upon the stillness of the night, broken as it was only by the dull undertone of the distant surf and the sighing of the breeze in the leafless trees, there rose, and gathered momentarily in volume, a sound as of the hurried breathing of a giant.

The rapid, short, panting noise was unmistakable; it could herald nothing but the approach of a gasoline motor. I confess that my heart leaped as I recognized the sound, confirming, as it seemed to, the accuracy of our reasoning.

Sevrance raised his head. "Was I right?" he demanded exultantly. "And we are here ahead of them. Now they can't escape us!"

But for my own part I was uneasy in my mind when it came to the prospect of confronting mine enemy there, on that lonely stretch of road. At least I knew enough of him to guess that he would go armed; and not yet had the advisability of a similar course occurred to me.

"Sevrance," I asked hurriedly—for now the motor's strident song was loud and clear and near, "are you armed?"

He turned to me a face livid in the starlight. "Armed? The devil! No!"

Four round and glaring eyes of flame jumped into sight, scarcely five hundred yards down the Saltsea road; for a moment they seemed to hang, vibrating, suspended in space; and then I observed that they were growing incredibly, with amazing swiftness. Lightninglike gleams of polished brass and steel seemed to play about the car; and the noise of its approach grew deafening.

It swung down upon us in a marvelous burst of speed, flying onward in a smother of fine dust. So high was the pace that I grasped at a fugitive hope that we might be mistaken, after all—that the machine was not going to stop before Saltacres lodge.

But the futility of that hope was soon made mani-

fest. I heard the hoarse, warning honk of the horn, and every bolt and joint of the huge machine seemed to shriek protest as the brakes were applied, bringing it to a total stop within thrice its length—and directly before us.

CHAPTER X

A PLUNGE INTO DARKNESS

For the next few seconds I had my hands full, and was unable clearly to comprehend what was taking place. Abruptly, as the automobile came to a halt, I saw that it was likely to terrify our horse into a fit of frenzy.

The brute was rearing and pawing the air, showing the whites of its eyes, jumping this way and that between the shafts of the fly, threatening every moment either to overturn the vehicle or to break loose and run away, so leaving us without means of return to the Rainbow at Saltsea Regis.

Such a catastrophe was to be averted at all costs. I sprang to the head of the animal, grabbed the bridle near the bit, and, by main strength and soothing words, managed to calm it into a state of trembling quiescence.

To this result I was aided by one of the occupants of the car, who had the sense or the decency, or both, to still the vibrations of the motor.

All of this, however, had taken but a minute or two. When I approached Sevrance again, it was simultaneously with one of the motorists, who had alighted, I observed, leaving two companions in the car.

I hurried forward, urged by strong apprehensions of trouble imminent and calamitous. To my infinite relief the man, passing under the glare of the lamp which

Thompson, the keeper, still held in the doorway, showed himself an utter stranger—at least, to me. And his first words indicated that he was unacquainted with my companion, who had not moved from his position by the lodge.

"Pardon, monsieur." The man addressed Sevrance, speaking in English strongly tinged with a foreign accent. "I," he continued, with strained courtesy, "beg to assure you that I am desolated to have affrighted your so noble animal, ze horse."

He was, then, unmistakably a Frenchman! The knowledge came to us both, combined with the absurdity of his opening remarks, with the effect of an abrupt tumble from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Dashing as the outcome was to our hopes—for they had been hopes, albeit commingled with the gravest apprehensions—neither Sevrance nor I could forbear laughing. This errant Frenchman, bowing and scraping and fumbling with his goggles and his motoring cap, presented a figure irresistibly comical—no less so than proved his words to us.

Sevrance gasped, in time to avert the other's threatened resentment, manifest in the stiffening of his pose: "You are entirely excusable, monsieur. Our noble animal, the horse, is no more than a country plug, and I don't believe he would have run very far if he had broken away."

"Many thanks," minced the fellow. "I am unutterabl' relieve'. You are mos' kind."

He became entangled with the straps of his mask and choked upon some following words; a second later he emerged, bareheaded, smiling and bowing inimitably.

A slight, pallid little man he proved, with small eyes, very quick, and an insignificant mustache.

"Permit me," he said, "to introduce myself—Monsieur Adolph Dechaud, of Paris, *en tour* een ze British Isle' wiz *mon ami,* Monsieur Chartier, an' ze chauffeur."

At the mention of his name, Monsieur Chartier piled out of the tonneau and came toward us. Sevrance bit his lip to repress a smile and introduced himself, adding my name. There was a moment or two of general, all-round gush, and then Dechaud, as he called himself, managed to deliver his questions—Chartier standing by, I remarked, rather taciturn, without removing his goggle mask.

It developed that the party, *en tour,* as they would have it, had started out of Lincoln for Great Grimsby, and had lost their way on what they aptly termed "ze downs so ver' horeebile." Would we, then, be so good as to set them right as to their whereabouts and their route?

We would willingly. Sevrance pointed out the northern road, giving minute directions. One question that he answered sticks in my mind, because of the significance that later attached unto it.

Dechaud had been giving an exhibition of crass stupidity. I remember wondering at the obstinacy with which he refused to understand Sevrance's directions.

"But," he repeated several times, "where ar-re we *now*? What is *zis* place?"

To which Sevrance finally made answer impatiently: "Saltacres, the estate of Lady Herbert; ten miles north of Saltsea Regis."

"Ah-h, ze Lady Herbert—ze gr-reat Eenglish

beauty, I believe? She reside here, in zis country so objectionable altogether?"

Sevrance told him no, that her ladyship lived in London. I fancied that the Frenchman seemed disappointed, but from then on his understanding improved noticeably and in a moment or two more he was back in the car, and, after insisting upon an exchange of cards and compliments, the party struck briskly out into the north.

To tell the truth, it was with some regret that I heard the hum of the motor die upon the night. They had passed on and out of our lives, it seemed, but their interruption had afforded us considerable amusement. The slight incident seemed almost memorable, since it was the only bright, laughable spot in a time of gloomy anxiety.

Sevrance struck a little bargain with the keeper, whereby Thompson promised not to mention having seen us, but, on the other hand, to find a means of apprising us instantly of the arrival of Lady Herbert, or of the receipt from her of any word indicating her arrival.

And so, not five minutes after the departure of the automobile, we were back in the fly, encouraging that noble animal, the plug, to take us home to the Rainbow.

We made the inn at about nine, and fell upon a smoking-hot supper like a pair of famished savages. The meal was served in the taproom of the Rainbow, and, as nearly as we could estimate, all the countryside was there to see. They sat around the tables in grave little groups, smoking and drinking from enormous pewter pots while watching us with intense gravity.

I don't suppose that four strangers had ever patron-

ized that inn at one and the same time before; that the incident assumed in the popular mind the importance of a village event; and for that reason I hardly blamed them. But the combined stares of so many pairs of eyes made me nervous. In particular I resented the attitude of our whilom fellow-traveler, the ancient, who sat in a far corner and never once ceased to accord our actions his undivided attention. Every now and again I would look up, and, as if drawn by magnetic attraction, my gaze would wander to his corner to encounter the animal-like, curious, and steady stare of his small bright eyes.

The meal over, we promptly retired to our rooms—small, chilly, and damp chambers, scantily furnished and provided with window sashes that rattled like castanets in the sea breeze—situate at the end of a corridor on the first floor.

Sevrance came into my room and prcëmpted the one chair, wherein he sat tilted back against the wall, glumly chewing a cigar which he was enjoying so little that he had permitted it to go out, and in which he took not even enough interest to relight. Grady was in his master's chamber, unpacking the suit cases. I flung myself full length upon the bed, to stare the ceiling out of countenance.

Neither of us, by any stretch of the imagination, could be described as in a happy frame of mind. I do not believe a dozen sentences had passed between us from the time of our parting with Thompson, the lodge keeper at Saltacres, and of them not one had borne upon the subject which was filling our minds almost to the point of obsession.

I remember that I was thinking that we had best instruct Grady to prepare for an early departure for London the following morning, since there could be no profit in a continued stay in Saltsea. It was quite apparent, as I viewed the matter, that Von Holzborn had succeeded in throwing us completely off the scent, and I felt gloomily convinced that by that time the blackguard had accomplished his end—had run off with Julia and persuaded her into an unconventional marriage.

Sevrance's opening remark, which came presently, was right in line with this dour reverie. He spoke abruptly, startling me with the appropriateness of his words to my thoughts.

"I suppose that you are for Portsmouth next?"

"Portsmouth?" I turned to look at him. "I'd take the first train if I imagined for a minute that there was anything to be gained. As it is, we can consider ourselves 'cutely hoodwinked, and it is my opinion that we had best drop the matter—put it out of our lives, as we must—Julia."

"You may do so if you wish," he said shortly. "I am not so complacent in defeat. In fact, I'll not acknowledge that I am beaten until we have more than circumstantial evidence to prove it. I was going to suggest that you, if you insisted, might go to Portsmouth."

"But you?"

"I'll stay. Julia did not trouble to send you that note for no purpose—nor, I venture to suggest, did she telephone her dressmaker without a motive."

"Then you think we had better stay?"

"Assuredly." He arose, walked the length of the room, and sat down, wearing an odd expression of attentiveness which I failed to understand. "She wrote," he continued, softly — indeed, almost whispering — "'Gordon, I need you.' She said 'Saltacres'—you're sure of that?"

"Positive."

"Very well, then," he said loudly. "We'll start back to-morrow."

"What!" I gasped.

But when I looked toward him he was not in the chair. I saw him, out of the tail of my eye, making swiftly, on tiptoe, for the door. In another instant he had it open.

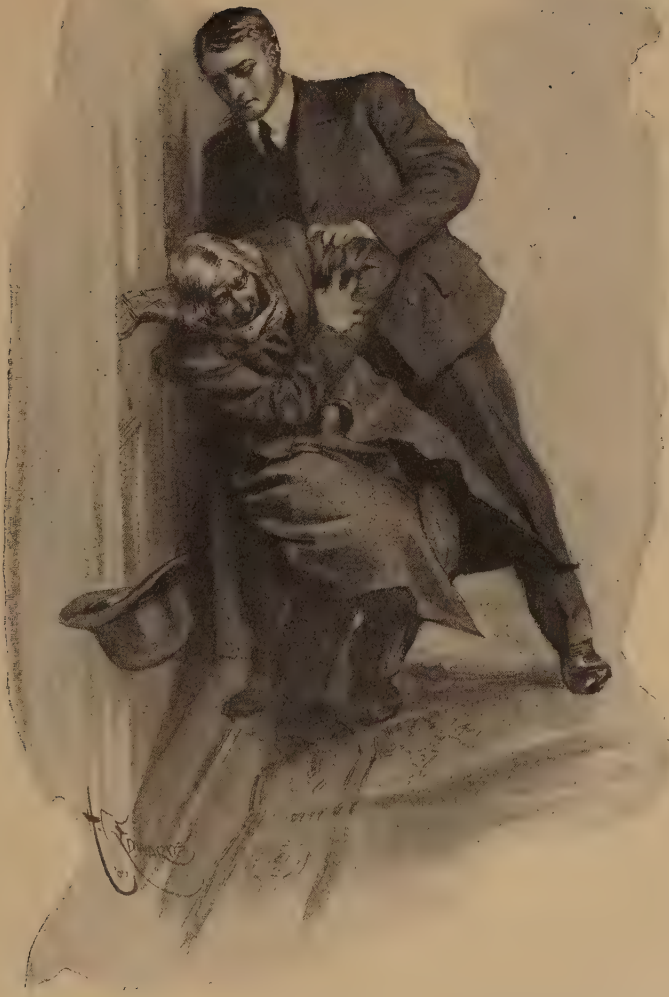
Startled, I sat up on the edge of the bed. I heard a whine of protest, a shuffle of feet—and the door slammed loudly, shutting in Sevrance with our aged and inquisitive fellow-guest of the Rainbow.

It was all consummated so swiftly that I was still blinking with amazement when I saw Sevrance release the arm which he had been grasping, and, with the quickness of thought, turn the key in the lock. The ancient appeared no less surprised than I; he stood quaking with the weakness of age, rheumy eyes glittering beneath the steely thatch of his brows, pendulous lower lip sagging.

Sevrance swung truculently upon him. "Now, sir, you'll perhaps explain!"

"I—I—" stammered the ancient. "You will excuse an old man, gentlemen——"

"Excuses be damned!" said Sevrance tersely. "You tell us why you were listening at the door."



"Shutting in Sevrance with our . . . fellow-guest of the Rainbow."

I fancied him a trifle rough—more so than the circumstances seemed to call for. The man was trembling, palpably confused and bewildered, aged hands a-quiver —the embodiment of senile distress.

"A mistake!" he protested, his old voice quavering. "I was seeking my room, sir, and mistook the door. You surely will excuse a simple error." He eyed the two of us anxiously, with quick, searching glances. "I can assure you that I did not intend to listen——"

"But you did!" Sevrance asserted, unyielding.

I thought it time to interfere. "Look here, Tony," I protested, "don't be quite so hard on him. Surely you can understand that mistakes will happen. You'd best apologize and unlock that door."

"I'll attend to this," said Sevrance rudely. "You—" He paused; the sourness of his expression was lightened by his winning smile. "But after all you are right," he conceded amiably, turning the key in the lock and opening the door; "mistakes will happen, as Mr. Traill insists. You, then, will be as lenient with mine as you expect me to be with yours, I trust. I bid you a very good evening. Good night, sir; good night. But don't err again, I counsel you."

The ancient's face flushed darkly red under the lash of Sevrance's irony. He straightened himself up angrily, and I anticipated a scathing reply. But, to the contrary, he seemed to change his mind, and, with a slight inclination of his head, left the room.

I prepared to rebuke Sevrance for his lack of consideration, and was framing a toploftical homily for his edification as he turned in and again secured the door.

"It seems to me—" I began; but Grady interrupted me. He had darted through the connecting doorway from Sevrance's room, and stood, beaming with delight, a boot in either hand.

"Shure," he commended his master, forgetting, for the time, his place, "'twas th' good dose ye gave the ould sinner, Mr. Sivrance, sor. Faith, an' 'twas meself that was susphectin' him av some divvlemint, iver sinst ye lift this afthernoon, sor."

I changed my mind about that little speech on a man's duty of respect to his elders, and challenged the valet:

"How's that, Grady?"

"Shure, thin," he replied warmly, "an' didn't I see him with the two eyes av me, talkin' about your honors to some min in an autymobile. Faith, an' I did that."

"Go on. Tell us about it," Sevrance encouraged him. "How did it happen?"

"'Twas the matther av an hour, or an hour an' a half, or mebbe two hours, sor, afther ye had set off, whin the divvle waggon sthopped in frint av here, and wan of the min in it got out to ask his way, sor. Thot ould rapscallion was poking around in the street for no reason at all, at all, that meself could see, an' th' minute he sees the machine stop he runs up and begins to jabber in Frinch wid th' payple in it. Not knowin' th' languarge, 'twas meself that understood nothin' at all, but not once but twice did I hear him mintion the two names av ye."

"The deuce you did!"

"Faith, yiss. And after some more talk the carr wint off like a flash, an' he come into the house, grin-

nin' to himself like a domned ould—savin' your honor's prisince——"

"How many men in the motor, Grady?"

"Three, sor."

"Very well, Grady. Thank you very much. Run along, now." Sevrance dismissed him.

"What do you make of that?" I demanded eagerly.

Sevrance shook his head dubiously. "I'm afraid to guess," he said slowly.

"You think—Von Holzborn——"

"Oh! undoubtedly. Else why should our name be passed to those men? Why, since they must have known their way—having asked it here—did they stop at the lodge? Why did they so persistently demand the name of the place, and dance about us until they had the light in our faces and at their own backs?"

He thrust his hands into his pockets, glowering at me as though I had been Holzborn himself. "Why did this old duffer sneak at the door? Oh, I was right there! And why is he playing a part—masquerading, as it were? Gordon, I tell you that he's not half his apparent age. He acted well, I grant you, but the muscles of the arm that I clutched, when I dragged him inside, were as heavy as mine, and as hard as steel—the muscles of a man in the prime of his life. Do you explain that in any way—other than that he is Von Holzborn's spy, set upon us for God knows what end?"

I said something dolefully in the negative. In truth, I was aghast at this abrupt development. "Why?" I asked.

"Don't ask that of me, Gordon; I'd give my hand to know. But, by Heaven, this business begins to

frighten me! Von Holzborn and De Netze are playing a game a thousandfold more damnable than you and I have guessed. Here are three men in his pay already, assembling in the neighborhood of Saltacres; and who can say how many more may be on the way?" His voice took on a savage note. "You mark my prophecy, Traill, there's something brewing of more than ordinary devilishness. And to think," he cried despairingly, "that they've involved that poor girl!"

"It's bad enough," I growled; "don't pile on the agony, Tony."

"Bad enough! It's maddening! Now shall we take train for London in the morning?"

"You can, if you wish."

"Don't be a silly ass— Grady!"

"Yiss, sor." The man appeared promptly.

"Grady," said Sevrance, "Mr. Traill and I have decided to stay here for perhaps a month. We suspect that there will be some trouble—involving Lady Herbert. You can keep a still tongue in your head?"

"Shure I can, your honor!"

"Very well. See that you do. I presume you'd prefer to go back and wait for me in London? You can make your preparations to leave to-morrow, if you wish."

Grady's broad Irish countenance became as long and doleful-looking as though he had been summarily dismissed from service.

"Aw, yer honor, 'tis thriflin' wid me ye are. Shure, an' ye don't intind to pack me off whin there's a bit av fun in soight? Ah! faith, 'tis meself thot won't go, thin—no, not if ye give me notice!"

He stood, in open rebellion, shaking his head at his master with heartbroken defiance.

"It's kicks I'll be giving ye," Sevrance mimicked him sourly. "Do you mean that you want to stay and take your share of the danger—if there is any?"

"Shure an' I do thot!"

"Very well, then, stay—confound you! I suppose I'll have to pay you double. Get out, now, and don't remind me of your existence until morning. And, Grady!"

The man paused with his hand on the door knob, looking at us with a face glowing with excitement.

"Grady," continued Sevrance, "you prepare to run down to Lincoln on the first train to-morrow. I want you to purchase us a brace of revolvers—the finest you can find."

"Only two, yer honor?"

"Well, three, then. And if you shoot yourself, your blood be upon your worthless head! Get out!"

Grady vanished.

"He's a good boy," I mused aloud. "After all, whatever befalls, we're three against them!"

Sevrance grunted disgustedly.

"Against how many?" he demanded bitterly. "Against what? What are we preparing to fight? The invisible?"

"We'll find it tangible enough before a great while," I ventured to predict.

CHAPTER XI

MOSTLY WEATHER

I STEPPED out of the taproom, after breakfasting, into a gusty morning. A keen wind—"blowing up for a gale," I overheard one characterize it—whipped in and out among the cottages of Saltsea Regis, blowing folk headlong down the winding street, banging shutters, greedy for the breath of one's body.

I was eager to button my coat against its searching chill, and set off for a saunter down the street toward the railway terminal—a progress that, to be frank, resembled more a struggle against an invisible but strong and agile opponent rather than a "saunter."

A brisk, headlong sea had kicked up during the night; eastward, as far as my sight served, the ocean was a welter of whitecaps, sparkling like diamond dust in the rays of a brilliant winter sun. In the cove the fishing craft were dancing fantastically at their moorings. A majority of the populace seemed to have assembled by the wharves, where they stood shaking sage heads at the audacity of certain dauntless souls who had hoisted sail upon their vessels and were obstinately beating out to windward.

Masses of high-piled clouds, of a somber hue, swinging steadily out of the east, made both land and sea a wide and restless patchwork of light and shadow, and, to my mind, justified the ominous predictions of the

weatherwise. There would be a "blow" indeed to contend with ere night, or all signs failed.

In a twinkling I discovered myself quite cheerful, with all the fears and misgivings and distempers of the past few days blown right out of me by the clean, crisp breath of the morning. I bent with determination to the wind and took a deal of pleasure from its buffetings.

Nevertheless, I was glad enough, after half an hour of it, to dodge into a little shop for a quiet breathing spell. By way of an excuse, I bargained for a pair of second-hand binoculars—the shop was a-litter with nautical miscellany—and presently, my purchase pocketed, put back to the Rainbow, already the possessor of an ambitious appetite.

For lunch, however, I concluded to wait until Sevrance returned; and so I locked myself in my room and took to focusing the distances of the North Sea with the glasses. They proved excellent of their kind, and I lost an hour or more watching the endless battle of the fishing smacks with the wind and waters.

Sevrance himself interrupted me, blustering into the room, redolent of the sweet, cold air of the downs, red as to his cheeks and with snapping eyes—for all the world like a whiff of the gale itself. He flung across to my window, slapping me on the shoulder with a brief, exultant laugh—and stopped stockstill, with wondering eyes.

"The deuce!" he cried breathlessly. "How did you learn——"

"Learn what?"

"Enough to get those glasses," he said. "They've been in my mind ever since— By Jove! there's telepathy for you!"

"If you'll moderate a trifle," I suggested, "and try to act like a gentle spring zephyr instead of a brute of a March blow—perhaps you'll become a bit more coherent."

"Perhaps," he agreed, sobering. "But, you know, it *is* a coincidence. Tell me, how did you get the glasses? Landlord, or——"

"I bought 'em," I interrupted.

"I knew it! Well, I've been thinking of buying a pair ever since I had word with Thompson. Gordon, old chap," he cried, slapping me on the shoulder again, and with a heartiness that made me wince, "we're not on a false trail, after all. Thompson met me halfway this morning, big with news."

He paused tantilizingly, nor continued until I threatened to do him a hurt. Then:

"Saltacres is being prepared for the reception of its chatelaine," he declared. "Thompson says that the housekeeper got a wire this morning, dated from Portsmouth, to the effect that Lady Herbert *and guests* would arrive on the *Myosotis* to-day or to-morrow. We have only then to wait and——"

"Watch." I took the word out of his mouth, and suited my action to it, putting the binoculars immediately to my eyes and sweeping the circle of the horizon.

"It's hardly to be expected that they would show up so soon," he advised me. "Still, there's a chance—and we must not fail to see the yacht. One of us—you or I, or Grady—must stand watch with the glasses every hour of the day until she arrives."

"You know the vessel from any other?" I doubted.

"Man, I was her passenger for six weeks in the Mediterranean, the winter before Sir Henry's death; I know her like the palm of my hand."

"But I——"

"You'll know her by the fact that she's a yacht; the very appearance of such a vessel off shore here at this time of the year would be sufficient evidence to identify the *Myosotis*. I can inform you that the North Sea's not popular for pleasure yachting at this season. There is too much chance of such a storm as seems to threaten now. I shouldn't like to be out there this night."

He pointed to the lowering distances, and as he spoke a sprinkle of rain and hail rattled upon the window pane. In the east the sky had become sullen and lowering, and the horizon presently vanished in a shroud of haze. Heavy gusts of wind set the casements a-shiver, and at times the very inn itself seemed to rock upon its foundations.

Frowning, Sevrance took the glasses, but he no more than had them to his eyes than the slate-colored waste of waters was obscured by a curtain of rain so heavy as to seem almost opaque. The thunder of its fall upon the tavern roof became deafening, and its myriad lashes whipped the nearer waters till they seemed to boil, steaming. Out of this came the gale, full-winged, in all the might of its fury, screaming terrifically, driving the rain before it at an acute angle, well-nigh horizontal.

"God help those a-sea this day and night!" said Sevrance fervently, putting down the binoculars.

"But the *Myosotis*?" I asked anxiously. "Will she be out there?"

"It depends upon the time of her start," he told me. "The ship's stanch and safe, equipped with turbine engines; she has a record of over twenty knots. With favoring conditions, the run from Portsmouth should not take a full twenty-four hours. But you can't tell. You can make your mind easy, however," he added; "no one in his senses would attempt a landing to-night. If the *Myosotis* is off coast now, she'll stand off until the sea has gone down. Should the gale subside during the night, they might make a landing late to-morrow afternoon. We'll get a rest and possess our souls with patience."

We did both, so far as lay within our ability. Toward evening Grady staggered in, drenched to the skin and chilled to the bone, with, he protested, no more than a mouthful of wind in the body of him.

He had, however, been successful in his mission, and produced, in proof thereof, three shiny, able-bodied revolvers, Colts, I believe, and Sevrance pronounced them forty-fours. In this connection I may as well make a clean breast of it and confess that my acquaintance with firearms, up to that time, was not extensive. I had never been much of a hunter, and beyond knowing that it was inadvisable to look down the barrel of an unloaded weapon, knew but little of guns—and cared less.

For which reason I regarded these with distrust, which I took no pains to conceal from Sevrance; I told him that I was afraid I might hurt somebody besides myself. But he was not disposed for badinage, and silenced me with the dry observation that that was the purpose for which revolvers were manufactured.

The howling of the gale kept me awake and listen-

ing for some hours of the night, but toward midnight it seemed to moderate, and I dropped off to sleep, waking to find that the wind had gone down to a mere whisper of breeze, and that the temperature had risen perceptibly.

To seaward, however, there was fog; and, before breakfast had been served in our rooms, this thickened and spread inland—a dense white and dripping blanket of moisture, as impenetrable as had been its dirtier London brother, which I had reason to remember.

"I can stand this no longer," Sevrance announced late in the afternoon; "I'm going out."

"Where?" I asked, sitting up.

"You can guess," he said curtly. "I'll go mad if I have to endure this uncertainty a moment longer."

"You think, then——"

"The surf is going down; they may send a boat ashore at any time now, if they can make their bearings. The *Myosotis* must be somewhere in the offing and it's certain that they will land as soon as the fog lifts. So I'm off. Are you coming?"

"In two shakes."

I was glad enough for the excuse, willing even to contemplate a fruitless drive through those infernal downs for the sake of being conscious that I was doing something, going somewhere.

Sevrance, however, dashed my hopes.

"It's a walk," he told me decisively; "that or nothing."

"Why?"

"Because of our ancient friend, Holzborn's spy. There's no need that he should suspect our destination,

and he won't unless we order the fly. We can slip away quietly, and leave no one the wiser. Grady, you get ready."

I demurred, but gave in when he quashed my objection that we would lose ourselves on the downs without the carriage.

"No danger," he said, "if we are careful to stick to the road. The way is plain, and you can't stray off without knowing it at once."

As it turned out, we were fated for once to make a move without being observed by the aged and inquisitive person; he was invisible when we descended the stairs, nor did he put in an appearance before we were out of the front door and lost to the house in the folds of that friendly mist.

Once there, indeed, a prey to misgivings though I was, I had no choice but to go ahead and trust to Sevrance's bump of locality. We might have been going 'most anywhere, so far as I could determine; the road of which he had been so confident was doubtless under our feet the whole of the way, but I would not have cared to risk a bet on that probability; I am free to admit my inability to judge of the lay of the land by the feel of it beneath my boot heels.

For that matter I had enough to occupy me with the task of keeping in touch with my companions; I walked in the middle of the trio, Sevrance and Grady looming on either hand like gigantic ghosts. Even when one spoke, his words sounded as though muffled, pressed back into his throat by the weight of the fog; its clammy hand seemed to have smoothed and soothed the troubled sea, whose voice came to us now and again

in prolonged and sonorous phrases, at times almost murmurous.

Otherwise there was a great and desolate silence that weighed heavily upon my spirits; it was as if the wide world lay lifeless, swathed in white grave clothes, already entombed in the womb of silence.

For possibly an hour and a half we progressed thus, with few words, each, I fancy, being somewhat awed and impressed with the profundity of that isolation which the fog passively forced upon us, with a sense of remote detachment from all living things and material matters. And then, abruptly, a hoarse and guttural bellow seemed to sound at our very feet and to shake the walls of the fog itself.

I started, catching Sevrance's arm; whereupon he laughed shortly, and said: "Listen." I obeyed, and my ears were rewarded with a repetition of the sound, this time a distant moan.

"What is that?" I demanded.

"Fog horn," Sevrance told me. "There's a light somewhere north of Saltacres, and we are just getting near enough to hear the signal."

"Whereabouts do you place us, then?" I asked.

"Halfway," he estimated; "we should be near the beach, where the road skirts it, if I'm not mistaken."

He was, in fact, right; a few steps more brought us out into the sandy soil, where the growl of the surf was more loud and insistent than it had sounded at any time since we started.

It was here that we were favored with our first gleam of promise, to hearten us with the knowledge that this long and blindfold tramp was not without an end.

We had traversed, I figure, some hundred yards of the damp and dragging sand of the beach, when a sudden exclamation from Grady induced me involuntarily to glance toward him.

To my amazement I saw him quite clearly; naught stood between us but clear air. He had turned and was pointing seaward. An instant later I understood that we were the debtors of a curious phenomenon; the fog seemed to have parted, rolling aside for our especial benefit; or, to put it more clearly, I felt as though we had unwittingly walked out into a wide and deep and long chasm between the walls of vapor. On either side the dead, white cliffs reared, tremulous; but ahead, as we stood looking out to sea, there extended a mile-long rift of clear air; and at its farther end we could see, as though we looked down an endless corridor, floored with deep blue, a single vessel.

She was heading inshore, at quarter speed, perhaps; a glistening, snow-white ship of considerable burden, modeled upon fine and swelling lines, with two graceful and tapering masts, two funnels amidships vomiting inky smoke.

The glasses were in my coat pocket; I was reaching for them, with my heart in my mouth, hoping against hope, when Sevrance himself snatched them.

When I turned he was adjusting them with feverish haste, his face pale with excitement; he had not an instant to lose, for already, as we looked, the yacht had poked her nose into the fog bank and was gradually disappearing from our view.

The broken, bronchial cough of the fog signal at the distant lighthouse saluted her, and with wonderful

distinctness the sonorous response of her whistle came to us. A second later she vanished, and Sevrance dropped the binoculars with an exclamation of irritation.

"Well?" I asked impatiently, trying to read his face.

"The *Myosotis*," he said, his voice unsteady, "or I'm a sinner!"

"The identification should be held as positive, then," I returned with a sigh of relief.

Almost at once the cloudy walls began to close; the vista of blue water narrowed swiftly; within a little moment it was gone, leaving us with an impression of the dreamlike unreality of the incident. But still we were only too glad to credit the evidence of our senses, and we pressed on with hearts wonderfully brightened.

A little later Sevrance caught me by the arm, and I, in my turn, stretched forth a hand to detain Grady.

"I've a suggestion," said Sevrance: "we should keep to the shore. By following that we cannot go astray; we have only to keep on until we reach Saltacres' limits. The boat landing is only a bit beyond. What do you say? It will save us a mile or so of walking," he urged.

"By all means," I agreed; and we turned back.

We had left the beach but a few paces behind, and it was an easy matter to retrace our steps and to turn again northward at the water's edge—by which route, indeed, we made more rapid progress, owing to the firmer foothold afforded by the sodden sands.

It was a matter of twenty minutes or so afterwards that Sevrance in a low tone warned us to be still and to listen. We obeyed—I considerably at a loss; for I was

convinced that we could not yet have crossed the boundaries of Saltacres.

Nor had we. As we stood, holding our breath and listening with an intentness commanded by Sevrance's own similar pose, there came to us, brokenly, the hum of a motor car, off somewhere in the hills to the left.

I caught Sevrance's eye, with a nod, to show him that I comprehended. He nodded back significantly.

The vibrating drone of powerful engines filled all the air, punctuated by short and dry coughs from the escape pipe—the whole indicating plainly that the car was running at a very low rate of speed; cautiously, no doubt, because of the fog. It seemed rank folly to me—the notion of taking a car out in such weather; and I could account for its presence only on one supposition.

"Do you suppose *they* know, too?" I whispered to Sevrance.

"Von Holzborn would keep them pretty accurately advised," he returned in the same manner. "Fortunately we have the advantage of having seen the yacht so near inshore; we shall beat them, by a few moments at worst."

He was off instantly, a misty shadow fleeting silently through the mists, with Grady and myself tagging stubbornly at his heels. The sound of the motor presently died, leaving an aching void, periodically split by the fog horn, and accentuated by the voice of the sea.

CHAPTER XII

SOME SHOTS TO THE PURPOSE

It was considerably later that we were compelled to scale the face of a ragged chalk bluff, whence onward we progressed more gingerly at the very verge of one of the characteristic low, abrupt cliffs of the region. Below us the sea growled menacingly as it gnawed at the rocks.

It now drew on toward evening—a fact made evident by a sharper tinge of chill in the air, and a perceptible darkening of the vague, distorted shadows which we passed without knowing what caused them.

But the way began to seem interminable, and I became sensible of fatigue. Growing impatient, I sprang ahead and caught up with Sevrance, who at once stopped.

"Well?" he said.

Grady joining us at that moment, I put the question: Would we ever arrive at the landing? To which Sevrance replied by a doubtful shake of the head.

"This cursed fog!" he said, in an undertone, which was, nevertheless, vindictive enough. "And night coming on, too!"

"It's discouraging," I sympathized. "Where do you fancy we are?"

"I don't know. To my way of thinking we should

have passed the spot some time ago; there was and should be now a beaten path running down to the cliff's edge, a railing and a flight of stairs to the beach below, and it's that I've been looking for. By mischance I have missed it, but——"

"What's thot?" Grady demanded sharply.

"Listen, thin," he said. "Faith, I thought I heard a whistle, your honors." As if to credit his interruption, there sounded at that moment a sharp and clear and shrill whistle, apparently from some point out over the waters.

"The *Myosotis*!" cried Sevrance, clutching my arm. "They've drifted in by dead reckoning, going upon the voice of that lighthouse horn."

I raised my hand, gesturing for silence, just as the tinkle of a bell floated in; thereafter, for a time, we heard quite distinctly the dull clamor of the engines, the jangling of bells, and the voice of a man—presumably a sailor in the bows—calling out a series of nautical phrases which I have forgotten. Sevrance said that he was taking soundings.

"They're standing close in," he explained to us, "but there's little danger, and deep water almost to the edge of the beach. They'll discover their mistake before long and draw off to anchor."

The event proved the accuracy of his deductions, for within the next few minutes the sound gradually receded until the voice of the man with the lead was almost indistinguishable, and the noise of the engines stilled to a murmur.

Shortly afterwards the whistle sang again, and we heard the clangor of steel chains running through

hawse holes. They were anchoring. Both Sevrance and I drew a deep breath of relief. It remained for us only to locate the head of the landing and await the party from the ship.

We spent half an hour or so in a fruitless search, and then the twilight deepened into a purple dusk, and we were forced to desist for fear of making a misstep in the darkness and falling over the edge of the cliff. Wretchedly enough—hungry, weary, cold, and wet—we huddled together in the shelter of a spreading tree and composed ourselves to wait.

It proved trying to the utmost of our patience. For a long time there was no sound from seaward.

With the final stage of darkness, however, when there remained to us no more than a mere glimmer of light, there came a most welcome change in the weather, inaugurated by the touch of a breath of air upon our cheeks.

Sevrance wet his finger and held it up. "A land breeze," he announced; "if it holds, or freshens, we'll have a clear night. That may be what they are anticipating, out there. In fact, I shouldn't care to cut loose from the vessel in a boat and run up and down the coast, looking for a landing, in this infernal——"

He broke off with a cry of delight; for already the breeze was waxing, the folds of mist about us trembling and wavering under its assault.

"Ten minutes of this," he prophesied, "and we'll——"

Even then the fog lifted, rolling back from the face of the earth like a wall of snow, slowly but resistlessly blown out to sea by that thrice-blessed wind.

"Praises be!" Grady gave thanks fervently.

Sevrance silenced him with a word, however, and we stood quietly watching the panorama of land and sea that unfolded to our eyes.

Above there was a gloomy sky, obscured by gigantic and flying masses of cloud, between which the high stars glinted. A pale and momentarily fading light wavered in the west.

Before us, not twenty paces distant, the summit of the cliff ran, a ragged line broken by the crouching masses of shrubs and undergrowth. A bit to the left the rectangular outlines of the stairway and landing were vaguely visible. Behind us lay a confused mass of shadows, masking the park of Saltacres.

Ahead, however, the mists rolled sullenly back, grudgingly disclosing more and more of the heaving waters. I made out gradually the looming bulks of two headlands, inclosing a little baylike anchorage with a broad mouth open to the sea. On the northernmost end of the irregular semicircle, some two miles distant, the lighthouse stood, ringed with a halo of fire.

Presently the receding fog bank gave up—to us—its chiefest treasure; the picture of the *Myosotis*, riding peacefully at anchor, ablaze with lights from stem to stern.

I thought of the binoculars, and put them to use, watching her for several minutes; and as I looked there was a stir and bustle aboard, accompanied by blasts of the boatswain's whistle, and I saw a boat swung out upon the davits and lowered.

Simultaneously a gangway was rigged out, and,

when it was completed, I could distinguish dimly a number of persons clustered on deck, about its head. A number of seamen apparently ran down and stationed themselves in the seats; I saw the flash of the upraised oars in the light from adjacent portholes. And shortly after four persons made the descent—two men and two women.

Silently I handed the glasses to Sevrance, conscious of the warm flush that was coloring my face, and grateful for the darkness that hid it from critical eyes. My heart was misbehaving sadly, too, and I experienced some trouble with my thoughts, which had escaped control; I had but one vision clearly before my eyes, and that was of a woman in a gown of glistening black, with bare arms and shoulders of a perfect pallor and hair of the hue of a sun-drenched wheat field—a perfect type of loveliness, bewitchingly exotic, in an opera box. . . .

"They're giving way," whispered Sevrance, returning the glasses to his eyes after a brief rest. "We'd best stay here until they're up the stairway. To be successful, our appearance should be a decided surprise —to Holzborn and De Netze, at least."

He laughed softly, putting a warning hand upon my arm. "Be careful," he said, "and don't speak above a whisper. One of Holzborn's Gallic allies may be near, and we don't wish for any unpleasantness until the proper time comes."

"Very well," I agreed, lapsing into blissful anticipations.

Ten seconds later I felt Grady's hand upon my shoulder and came out of my dreams with a start. "What is it?" I whispered.

"Whist!" cautioned the man sibilantly. "Faith, an' I dunno phwat ut is, sor, but 'tis meself thot's convinced there be others waitin' about us, sor, and ye had bist take this and kape ut convanyunt." He pressed the butt of the revolver into my hand. "I tuk thought to bring ut wid me, sor," he explained, "thinkin' ut might come in handy. Pass ut along to Misther Sivrince, sor, if ye plaze, an' take this other."

I touched Sevrance's elbow and communicated Grady's fears, at the same time giving him the weapon. My own, with a shudder of aversion, I pocketed, mentally registering a vow that no power on earth could induce me to point it at a brother man and pull the trigger.

Sevrance put the binoculars away and silently worked himself behind me until he was in a position to converse with Grady without raising his voice.

"What did you hear?"

"Divvle a sound, beggin' your honor's pardon, sor," said Grady quickly, "but 'twas in me mind that I saw a shadow move from wan three to another, a bit back, and this past minute I'd have tuk me oath thot it happined ag'in. 'Tis as well to be prephared, sor."

"Very well. Keep your eyes open," Sevrance instructed him. "Nerves," he commented guardedly, in my ear. "There's not a soul about—I'd swear. But we'd best not bank on it."

"Why should Von Holzborn's allies hide?" I asked doubtingly.

"God knows. Why are matters in the shape they are? There's no accounting for the unaccountable. Myself, I'll look for the worst where the Prussian and

the Russian are concerned. It may be that some fresh phase of their villainy is about to be shown."

By now the boat had passed into the shadow of the cliff and we could no longer watch its shoreward progress; on the other hand, the splashing of the oars and the creaking of oar locks were clearly audible. Now and again I heard, or thought I heard, a voice raised in words of command. Somewhat later there floated up to us a sudden confusion of shouts and the grating of iron upon the shingle below. They were running the boat up out of the surf.

Every muscle in my body seemed to stiffen to tenseness; I gazed with all my soul at the top of the stairway, where I should first see the woman of my dreams. Sevrance and Grady, at my side, made no sound, and otherwise, for a space, there was nothing to be heard but the breeze in the naked branches of the trees and the long crashing of the surf.

Then I heard a voice distinctly—Von Holzborn's. What he said I do not know, but the intonation was his unmistakably—the quiet, assured, insinuating laugh that grated upon my nerves like the screech of a pencil on a slate.

His was the first figure that I saw, clearly silhouetted against the flying cloud wrack; the precision of his movements, the set of his head, the military habit of his broad shoulders made him a marked man, not to be confused with any other. He bent low from the top landing, giving a hand to assist the woman who followed him; and when I realized that his hand was touching the hand of Heart's Desire, I thought guiltily of the weapon resting ready to my hand in the side pocket of my coat.

For I realized very poignantly that I hated him with all my heart and all my soul and all my strength, and that I would have shot him without compunction—indeed, with all the good will in the world.

But the temptation passed with the sight of Julia. He helped her gallantly, and in a second she stood beside him, breathing heavily.

My heart leaped, recognizing its mistress. She wore a long cloak of some dark stuff, which enveloped her from head to heels, yet might not hide the grace and beauty that marked her every step and gesture. In its hood, as the pale starlight fell across her face, she looked very young and sweet and girlish and innocent—almost childish—and very, very weary and distressed.

She was gazing intently into Von Holzborn's face, for some reason; he bent deferentially and said something in an undertone. At once she seemed to comprehend that he was retaining his grasp of her fingers, and took them from him quickly, stepping aside and away from him without a word. I think he laughed slightly and insolently, as a man confident of his conquest.

Behind them the head and shoulders of a second woman appeared above the landing. She came up quickly and with the spring of youth in her movements, giving Von Holzborn a laughing word as he released her hand.

De Netze followed, his slight figure and the elegance of his bearing identifying him immediately. He was carrying a stick under his arm, which he whipped out briskly and put his weight upon, seeming to need the support.

"At last!" he said—or, rather, gasped at Von

Holzborn. His words rang clear, flawless, crisp, like newly coined metal, as I remembered it.

The Prussian grunted shortly.

"At last," he agreed. "You have a disgustingly selfish care for your carcass, Netze. So long as you have its safety to consider, you are dead to all else."

"Generous man!" commented the Russian with bland but biting sarcasm. "Holzborn, the generous, astute, brave, affable and—unselfish! *Mes compliments, monsieur.*"

"Oh, come," said the German. "We can't waste time. You're satisfied, now, I gather; the main consideration of your personal safety is assured. Madam, will you take my——"

He turned toward Julia, crooking a respectful elbow, yet with a certain air of command. I fancied that she seemed to hesitate, to draw away. The passage was over within so brief an instant that I could not be sure; for, even as they stood there, she hesitant, he with his sentence unfinished, a cry of warning from De Netze settled the matter.

The Russian, who had advanced a couple of yards from the landing, came to a halt a few paces ahead of the rest of the party. I saw him throw his head back sharply, with a click of the teeth; at the same time, and with a single alert gesture, he swung his cane before him, grasping it near the head with his left hand. There was a shrill shiver of sound, and a yard of steel gleamed where the stick had been.

But, quickly though he had acted—warned in the first instance by I know not what instinct—he was yet mortally slow.

Simultanously there was a rush of feet, and I saw a shadowy form dart from the brush and fasten itself upon the Russian—moving with the celerity and with something of the ruthless ferocity of an animal. Indeed, aside from its bulk, judging alone by the swiftness of the attack and the pantherlike sureness of its spring, the thing might well have been a cat of the jungle.

De Netze cried aloud, staggering, borne back by the impetus of the assault. With incredible address he shortened his hold upon the sword cane and used it as a poniard; I saw his white hand rise and fall twice, burying the slim blade in the back of the assassin. The man choked—a dreadful, gurgling sound—and abruptly fell away, dropping at length, a limp and ghastly shape upon the frozen ground.

But hard upon his heels came others—four crouching shadows hardly less implacably intent than their fellow. Two made for De Netze, the others darting toward Von Holzborn.

The Russian, reeling, with his head drooping forward between his shoulders, seeming about to fall, rallied astonishingly. He brought his heels together, jerked up his chin, and I caught the flash of his eyes in the starlight. I heard him cry out, once only—the only word, I believe, that the man uttered from first to last of the affair:

"*Ah-h!*"

It was like the cry of a man wounded nigh unto death, who, nevertheless, saw a chance for retaliation, who was ready to accept the battle against odds.

He swung upon his left heel, advancing his right foot sharply, lunging with a straight arm; one of the

assassins stepped back upon the instant, thereby saving his life for the moment.

The whole affair has passed before us with a dream-like illusion of unreality. Myself, I stood transfixed, aghast with the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the attack. It flashed through my mind that we had been mistaken, that those whom we had considered Von Holzborn's allies were his enemies; and they were even then proving the truth of this surmise.

It required Sevrance's word to rouse me to action.

"By Heaven!" I heard him cry. "That's murder, Traill!"

At once he sprang forward, drawing his revolver, and firing as he ran. The man nearest Von Holzborn paused in the middle of a leap, threw forward his hands, and crumpled upon the earth.

An instant later there came two shots, one sharp upon the other. The German's second assailant went down in a heap, and I saw Von Holzborn himself drop a revolver from his outstretched hand and fall back cursing.

I had already jumped to the assistance of De Netze; Von Holzborn could go hang for all of me. I ran, I remember, awkwardly, fumbling with that infernal pistol.

The Russian was keeping the fellows at bay with a rare and admirable address, his sword point ringing him as with an impregnable wall of steel. They circled about like twin wolves, long knives poised in their hands, watching their opportunity to cut in under his defense. He touched one lightly on the shoulder. Simultaneously I fired at the other.

My shot flew wide, doubtless, and I feared to use the weapon again; I was then close upon the fellow; he had jumped aside at the shot and stood at pause in a direct line with Monsieur de Netze and Julia. The following moment brought me within jumping distance; he turned, snarling, and grappled, catching me about the waist and putting his knife through the breast of my coat; I was conscious of the kiss of the cold steel against my ribs.

Just what happened in the next three or four seconds I cannot recount very clearly. I recall only that I heard the roar of my revolver and saw the flash of it, crimson and gold fire, before my eyes. The grip of the assassin relaxed. He slumped back, flinging out his arms blindly; I saw distinctly that he had no face.

The sight of my handiwork sickened me.

De Netze was, at the time, finishing his antagonist. He lunged thrice, with skillful precision, fighting as imperturbably as though in a bout with buttoned foils on a gymnasium mat. At the third thrust the blade vanished—rammed to the hilt in the man's breast. In falling it was twisted out of the Russian's grasp.

CHAPTER XIII

EXPLANATORY

ALTOGETHER, I suppose, the assault had occupied a period of four or five minutes. It seemed to end as abruptly as it had begun; in retrospect I find myself able to liken it to the effect of a kinetoscopic illusion. With the sobbing death cry of De Netze's final victim—it was over, the incident ended, the picture complete.

Where there had been cries, stamping of feet, reports of pistols, and the ring of steel, together with the moans of the wounded, now came a stillness accentuated rather than broken by the purring of the sea; a quiet wherein we all stood, for a space, motionless and stupefied by the horror of the affair.

For my own part, with the passing of the call upon my wits, there seemed to fall upon me a sort of apathy —I have in mind no other word which will serve more nearly to characterize the sensation. I felt myself dumb, unnerved, and profoundly amazed.

Good citizens in the accepted sense of the term; living out their sheltered days in the encompassing peace of law-abiding communities; deriving their knowledge of wars from the newspapers' highly tinted pictures or from the hardly less gaudily illuminated pages of historical novels—have little appreciation of the unusual. The strange, the startling, terrible, and appalling events

of life; overt acts of scheming scoundrels; flashes of naked passion, vivid against the grayness of the commonplace; the shock of charging armies, the clash of conflict brought to pass by primitive loves and hates; the triumph of brute strength over brute strength—these phases of life now and again are inevitably encountered.

But they make no impression commensurate in the least with their significance. They are viewed darkly, through the smoked glasses of an artificial and unnatural mode of life; they wear an air of strange unreality.

In a word, to men who have not seen men die in battle, war is unreal, death by violence a fanciful fallacy.

And so it was to me. I who had dawdled through twenty-seven years of what I had held to be life—the life of Rome and New York, of Paris, Berlin, and Munich, where one sees naught beneath the fine veneer of civilization—I, in a crowded moment brought abruptly face to face with this recrudescence of the primordial savagery latent in man—I who, after twenty-seven years of a comparatively inoffensive existence, had in one gust of passion killed my kind—I felt my conception of life shaken to its foundations.

I stood above the body of my victim, numb and dazed, marveling—as one might who, blind and having lived his life in sheltered darkness, suddenly finds himself endowed with sight, able to know the light of day, to sense the glimmering mystery of night—seeing about him for the first time life and death, the solid earth, and the infinity of the firmament.

A slight cry from Netze brought me to my senses. I looked around stupidly, glancing from one to another

of those who lived, unconsciously reviewing the array of the dead.

De Netze stood nearest me, as I have indicated. He, too, seemed suddenly roused from a trancelike state. His words, I think, were Russian; they had the intonation of an oath. He stood erect enough, clutching his left shoulder with his right hand. Our eyes met, and he nodded blankly, evidencing uncomprehending surprise at the appropriateness of our meeting.

From him my eyes traveled on to the others; to Julia, who remained as if transfixed upon the spot where she had stood when first De Netze had raised the alarm; to Mrs. Morchester, apparently similarly thunderstruck; to Sevrance, who seemed to have slipped and now was rising from a kneeling posture; to Grady, halted in the edge of the shadow, his revolver still poised for use; and, finally, to my dearest enemy, Von Holzborn, who had fallen back against the railing of the landing, and, I thought, had all but fainted with the pain of his wound.

As I looked, however, he straightened himself up with an effort, and attempted to walk toward Julia. He seemed to have overestimated his strength, for, after a step or two, he tottered and would have fallen but for Sevrance, who sprang forward and caught him gently.

Von Holzborn's head dropped back upon my friend's breast; his eyes rested upon Sevrance's face. I heard him say, however, feebly:

"Ah, Mr. Sevrance! We are well met, *hein?* And your friend, Mr. Traill?"

"Is here," Sevrance informed him.

Von Holzborn groaned, shutting his eyes. We had all drawn near him, moved by strong sympathy for the

sufferer. In another moment he rallied. His lips rolled back a bit and his strong white teeth showed between, set firm. Then he reopened his eyes and fixed them upon me.

"Mr. Traill," he said calmly, "this is unkind of you, sir. I had fancied that you would warn us, give us some chance for our lives. A dastardly attack, sir, upon my word!"

It was the one false move that I ever knew the man to make. If he thought, as it was apparent he thought, to shift against us suspicion as the authors of the assault, he failed signally. Julia, for one, could never have been turned against me by such insinuations; and his own associate, De Netze, spoke up in my defense.

"You are mistaken, my friend," he said quietly. "We owe to Messieurs Traill and Sevrance our lives. They saved us. It was the Secret Chapter that struck through these others."

Von Holzborn glanced swiftly toward Julia, reading her eyes. She was looking toward me with such an expression of hope and relief and pride that he could not misread it.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he gasped. "I dare say I am a trifle light of the head. This cursed wound!" And he groaned again convincingly. "Let me down, I beg of you, Mr. Sevrance," he went on. "I cannot stand. I fear they've done for me at last."

Sevrance complied, depositing the man's huge form gently upon the earth. "Let me see," he added, dropping on his knees and offering to investigate.

But the German pushed him aside with an imperative hand, oddly strong in view of his disability. "You

can do nothing," he insisted. "It is not a case for—what you call it?—'First Aid to the Injured.' I am mortally hurt—Netze, *mon ami?*"

"I am here."

"Hail the *Myosotis*. Tell them to send Dr. Chine."

Appropriately, on the very echo of his words, there came a hail from the beach: "*Aho-o-oy!*" The firing had been heard by those aboard the boat, and it had put back, it seemed. The Russian stepped to the landing, cupped his hands, and cried out the information that the party had been set upon by a gang of thieves but had beaten them off; adding that the ship's surgeon would be needed, and that at once.

I looked toward Heart's Desire, and found her attention still fixed upon me. And now I felt myself amply recompensed for the danger we had braved for her sake.

For in the starlight the pallid oval of her face gleamed softly, like pale fire, illumined with the gladness of her greeting. Her eyes were deeply and sweetly shadowed, but far in their dark depths I saw that which told me I had not erred in believing her heart still mine. Despite the world's contradiction, for all that she stood pledged to another, through whatever trials and perils had passed or were to come, she was mine.

Her lips moved, as did she, falteringly. I caught the bare whisper of my name, breathed rather than uttered: "Gordon!" And in that instant I was by her side, my arms a ready haven for her dear and weary form.

I believe that no other word was spoken at that time. I, at least, heard no more than my name. But Julia's

eyes were eloquent enough. Lifted out of herself by the strain and terror induced by the fearful experience just past, she forgot self for the moment; and, if not in words, surely by her looks and in her attitude, as she seemed to droop, like a tired child, toward me, she gave herself completely into my keeping, into my protection. In another breath, I verily believe, she would have been in my arms, regardless of convention, regardless of Von Holzborn—reckless of all.

But the German intervened. Wounded and spent though he was, he had lost not a jot of his clear sentience, not an atom of his calculating composure. Nor, I believe, had he lost a look or a gesture that had passed between Heart's Desire and myself; and when the time was ripe for interference, he spoke, with an affecting weakness of voice:

"Julia!"

I fancied that Julia quivered under the reproach of his tone. Her eyes fell before mine, and she turned away with a little sigh.

The man stared up at her through narrowed eyelids.

"Julia," he said again faintly.

She knelt by his side.

"What can I do?" she asked unsteadily. "You are—are badly hurt?"

I could see that she infused feeling into her words with an effort.

"I am dying," said the man clearly. "I am—done——" His lids drooped over his eyes again. "I —am very cold," he added almost inaudibly.

In an instant she had gathered his head in her arms, her face a mirror of her compassion for his suffering.

I caught a gleam of those cloudy, malevolent eyes of his, dulled by the lowered lashes, and turned away.

De Netze, Sevrance, and Mrs. Morchester had drawn to one side, where they stood whispering, with heads together, awed by the rustling of the wings that seemed to be hovering over the Prussian's head—the wings of death.

Grady was leaning with his back to the railing of the landing, a revolver dangling in one hand, keen eyes intent on the wooded park that stretched inland. Recognizing in him a sufficient sentinel against another attack, I joined the group.

They received me with subdued greetings. Sevrance, in an undertone, introduced me to Mrs. Morchester. We nodded, and I touched the tip of a gloved finger which she extended. She impressed me as a neutral identity, pale and colorless, of indifferent importance; and I paid her little heed—though there was slight need to do so, for she spoke but infrequently.

De Netze, with the glasses, occasionally turned and stared at the yacht. As I approached, he announced:

"The boat's returning."

"You are wounded, sir?" I asked him.

He smiled faintly. "A mere scratch again," he disclaimed. "They are unfortunate—those enemies of mine. It was a close call, but"—he bowed ceremoniously—"I had your assistance, as usual. Another time," he pursued speculatively, "they may have better luck."

"Have you identified them?" I inquired.

"There's hardly need," he laughed nervously. "Still—I was about to do so."

He moved off, with a gesture inviting me to join

him. Sevrance took the glasses and focused them upon the *Myosotis*. Hesitating for an instant, I concluded to go with the Russian. If there was anything to be gotten out of Mrs. Morchester, I could trust Sevrance to do his part. In the meantime, the Russian might let something slip in an incautious moment.

He proved, on the contrary, extremely close-mouthed. We visited, in turn, each of the five bodies which lay about in the little clearing, witnesses to our prowess; and each he examined closely, first for signs of vitality, afterwards for papers—I presumed.

Neither was found. The men lay stark, one and all cold. At this De Netze nodded his satisfaction. "If there were no more about," he said thoughtfully, "we might consider ourselves fortunate. I am astonished," he continued, "that they should have followed us so cunningly; I had thought them outwitted."

"Who are they? Do you know?"

De Netze pursed his lips, favoring me with a keen, sidelong glance, not, however, devoid of respect and liking.

"Two of them," he said slowly, "you should remember: Sept and Baron von Beller. They afforded you some entertainment upon a night not long ago. As for the others, all that I can say is that they are members of the notorious Secret Chapter. Ah! what is it, now?"

For I, bending over the body of the man whom Sevrance had shot, had cried out in surprise.

The fellow was our aged and inquisitive friend of the Rainbow!

I explained the circumstances briefly, De Netze nodding his comprehension.

"So they tracked us through you," he deliberated. "That is the way of it. Certainly we can speak this good of the dead: they were acute, *mon ami.* And this old gentleman——"

He laughed unpleasantly, and, with a single movement, and abruptly, scalped the patriarch of his silvery white wig, exposing a head of black hair, close-cropped. A tug at each of the heavy and overhanging eyebrows removed them also. The face that, sightless and lifeless, stared up to the stars, then seemed to have lost twenty years; it proved that of a young man, not above thirty.

"Very careful and cautious!" De Netze commented.

His searching of their pockets and patting of their clothes brought to light nothing but a pocketbook filled with Bank of England notes and a couple of handfuls of silver and gold, with as much more miscellaneous trash of no importance, such as men are accustomed to cart around in their pockets.

"Now, as to that automobile," De Netze pondered aloud, "where would it be?"

"Impossible to say," I responded. "Very likely it is at a stop in the roadway somewhere near Saltacres. That should be looked into."

"I will see to it," the Russian replied. "If it is gone, we may take it as conclusive that our friends are not all dead. We may yet have trouble with them."

"Beggin' yer honors' pardons," Grady put in, "but 'twas meself thot heard at laste wan av thim scuttlin' away through th' bushes, jist afther th' shindy."

"Ah!" De Netze nodded. "I fancied as much."

Presently we were interrupted by the arrival of the boat; a hail from the beach below apprised us of the fact; and a moment later six or eight dark forms made their way up the stairs. Among them I was surprised to notice the flutter of a woman's skirts; but it turned out that they were the property of Julia's maid, Eunice by name, whose coming in the second boatload, together with Von Holzborn's man, Fritz, and the luggage of the party, had been planned beforehand.

Of the second party was the ship's surgeon, one Dr. Chine, a close-lipped, self-possessed, darkly sallow little man; and a man whom I heard addressed as Captain Keen—from which I correctly presumed him the captain of the *Myosotis*. At the time we were not brought together, and I got but a fugitive impression of a short, stout, and unwieldy figure, clothed in a dark uniform and an air of authority, and of a voice of great caliber which was modulated to a husky, throaty roar.

De Netze hurried forward and got the captain's ear, drawing him to one side and volubly narrating his version of the attack.

The surgeon, on the other hand, was called by Julia directly to Von Holzborn's side. He had not more than fallen upon his knees, however, when I heard the German speak, and knew that he was conscious. An instant later Julia gently disengaged herself and returned to our group, Fritz taking her place. She said nothing, taking a silent stand by Mrs. Morchester's side.

All, including myself, fell into an apprehensive silence, watching the surgeon work over his patient. Von Holzborn lay at a distance too great for their words

to be audible to us; and once, when Sevrance approached with an offer of assistance, Chine waved him back.

A little later Captain Keen was beckoned to join them; he stepped forward quickly, dropping on his knees with a deferential manner, and listening attentively to something which Von Holzborn had to say. Now and again he nodded his head and said "Very well, sir," with an air of marked respect—not to say of subservience.

I deduced that Von Holzborn was giving orders, and I was somewhat surprised by the fact. Nominally, at least, Lady Herbert was the employer of Captain Keen; but when I glanced toward her, looking, I've no doubt, my question, she avoided my eye, and presently turned away, leaning upon the rail and staring soberly out to sea, her chin cradled in the hollow of her hand.

Unable longer to control my impatience, I stepped to her side.

"Julia—" I began brokenly.

She made me pause with an appealing gesture. For a moment her eyes were upon mine, and I fancied that she was badly frightened, though I know not at what.

"Have you nothing at all to say to me?" I pleaded.

"Only this, Gordon," she breathed hurriedly, her glance unconsciously straying to Von Holzborn's recumbent form, as though she feared that, even from the distance, he might overhear her—"only this: that it was good—ah, so good of you!—to come to me. I need you, Gordon, need you!" Her voice broke; she seemed to struggle, and went on: "But I can't talk now—I dare not. I would ask of you just one thing, for the present."

"And that is——"

"Don't leave me, Gordon; don't let anything induce you to leave me!"

"Nothing could make me," I asserted quietly; "not while——"

"Hush!" She seemed to shudder with alarm at her audacity. "And one thing more: Under no circumstances, Gordon, must you admit that I—I ever wrote you, or sent you word. Your presence here is entirely accidental—do you understand?"

"Clearly," I affirmed.

"And, oh! Gordon, have a care—have a care how you deal with that man! He is not——"

"Lady Herbert, you are wanted, I believe," I heard Sevrance say quickly.

Turning, I saw that his words had been in the nature of a warning. Von Holzborn's man, Fritz, was approaching us on tiptoe, almost, with a bearing that made me believe he had been commissioned to eavesdrop upon our conversation.

His stolid German countenance, however, had borrowed something of his master's impassiveness. He showed no resentment, nor once glanced toward Sevrance, but stopped at a little distance, saluted respectfully, and delivered his message. The Herr Captain desired to speak with her ladyship.

She turned away without a word and joined the group about the German's recumbent form—a group which, I now saw, had been reënforced by De Netze.

At the same time Dr. Chine rose, dusted the mold from his knees very precisely, and approached us, addressing himself to Mrs. Morchester, as the one member of the party with whom he was acquainted. She made

us known to the man, and he acknowledged the introduction with a brief and businesslike nod and a fleeting, saturnine smile.

"Captain von Holzborn," he announced, "is very seriously wounded—I will not say mortally, as yet. There is a fighting chance for him; we may be able to pull him through. But," he amended with caution, "it is not certain."

De Netze approaching at that moment, the surgeon reopened his case of instruments with professional alacrity.

"Your own wound, sir?" he suggested.

"Nothing of consequence," asserted the Russian. "The man struck wildly, and the knife penetrated the fleshy part of my shoulder. I will bandage it myself at a more suitable time. Thank you, monsieur."

Chine shut his case with a disappointed snap.

"Mrs. Morchester?" Julia called.

"Yes, Julia?"

"We will go on up to the Hall, now, if you please. Fritz and Eunice will accompany us. And may I requisition your man, Mr. Sevrance? Grady might help Fritz back with the litter. It has been decided," she explained, "that it would be too dangerous to attempt to remove Captain von Holzborn to the *Myosotis* tonight. We shall carry out our original purpose, therefore, and take refuge in Saltacres Hall. Monsieur de Netze will accompany us, and I venture to ask Mr. Traill and Mr. Sevrance to be our guests for the night. You will come—to help guard us, gentlemen?" she concluded, with a wan, pitiful simulation of her smile.

There was, of course, no question as to that. In the

meantime, it was decided she was to go on in company with the servants and Mrs. Morchester, while Sevrance and I, by special request of Von Holzborn, were asked to remain and help guard that gentleman against further attack, should there be any.

If I had had my way about it, I should have announced my intention of letting him go to the devil at his convenience and through whatever agent Providence might designate. Such an announcement being, to say the least, inadvisable, as well as inhuman, I schooled myself to a silent acquiescence.

CHAPTER XIV

CAPTURE AND ESCAPE

THERE was a little bustle and confusion; and then my Heart's Desire, with her party, moved away and was swallowed up in the shadows of the woodland. Chine returned to his patient, whom Captain Keen had never left. The seamen from the *Myosotis* huddled together at a distance, gossiping in undertones.

After a while Keen arose and issued a succession of orders, which they sprang with alacrity to obey, seizing the bodies of the dead men and carrying them quickly down the stairs to the beach below. De Netze explained this matter quite plausibly. It was advisable, he said, that the affair should be kept as quiet as possible. It was for that reason alone, for instance, that her ladyship had given orders that no more than three trusted servants of the family should be employed about Saltacres Hall during this clandestine visit.

"I am desolated," said the Russian, "to think that I should be the cause of such trouble to my most kind friends. It is useless to disguise the fact that all this was arranged on my account alone; we could imagine no more safe hiding place in all England than this same Saltacres Hall. But it seems that they tracked us even here." He sighed wearily. "Now, these *canaille*," he continued, indicating the bodies with a scornful wave of his hand, "are to be carried out to sea and buried—

with a weight at the feet of each. Then there will remain no dead men to tell tales upon us." He laughed unpleasantly.

"What is the motive for this persistent desire for your life?" Sevrance asked. "That is, if I am not asking too much——"

"Ah! not in the least, monsieur! To the contrary—what have I to hide? You are aware that my services are held in some slight esteem by his Majesty the Czar. So! My life is, therefore, a thing obnoxious to the Secret Chapter of the revolutionary party."

"Why didn't they shoot you outright, then?"

"They wished to take me alive, and to keep me so, for a time. As to the end—I have no doubts at all! But, while living, they might have persuaded me to talk more than I would out of captivity."

"Persuade?" said Sevrance.

"Even to-day there are methods of persuasion," said De Netze calmly, "not inferior to those practiced by the Inquisition, *mes amis*."

In due course Grady and Fritz returned with a litter. Von Holzborn was laid upon it, groaning pitifully. Chine administered a stimulant, the party bade farewell to Captain Keen and turned toward Saltacres Hall, accompanied by the surgeon and three sailors from the yacht.

If any member of the mysterious Secret Chapter lurked about, he was at pains not to make his presence known. Before starting Grady found time to inform me that Thompson, the lodge keeper, had seen an automobile pass the lodge, north bound, with a bareheaded man for its sole passenger, some ten minutes or so after

the probable time of the encounter on the cliff. It but confirmed our suspicions that one of the assassins had made good his escape.

The Russian's brow furrowed with anxiety when I informed him of this incident. Nevertheless, he maintained, we were assured of three or four days' respite from further annoyance or assault. It would take some time, he was confident, to assemble in our neighborhood enough members of the revolutionary party then in England—enough for a successful attack upon our party, he amended. There would be plenty of time to devise a way out of the difficulty.

Our arrival at the Hall was likewise devoid of incident. Von Holzborn was at once carried upstairs to a bedchamber assigned to his use, De Netze accompanying him with the surgeon. Sevrance and I were left standing below in the great hallway, warming ourselves in the grateful heat of the fire that blazed in the huge, old-fashioned chimney. I remember feeling awkward and out of place.

After a long time the housekeeper, an aged and withered body, plainly half frightened out of her wits, approached us and made her ladyship's excuses for the seeming inhospitality of our reception. Her ladyship was unnerved and almost in hysterics because of the dreadful strain she had endured, the woman told us, and begged to be excused until the following morning.

In the meantime, we were informed, our rooms were being prepared for our reception; we would be shown to them after supper; we acquiesced apathetically, too weary for words.

Supper was served us alone in the breakfast room.

Grady attended; he had no news; he had been given to understand that his room was preferable to his company, it seemed, promptly upon the arrival of the litter in Von Holzborn's apartment. De Netze, however, had told the Irishman off for sentry duty during the night—a task which he was to share with the seamen from the *Myosotis*.

A bucolic lackey lighted Sevrance and myself to our rooms. They proved adjoining ones, in, I gathered, a remote wing of the building. Sevrance did not remember ever having entered either before; and the darkness of the night together with my own total unfamiliarity with the place made it impossible for me to determine precisely where they were situate.

However, they were large, they were heated, and each contained a roomy, old-fashioned bed. Shortly after we began to undress Grady appeared with a hot toddy, which, he said, Dr. Chine had suggested might be acceptable. We proved the truth of his supposition by downing the draught without much ceremony.

Between its fumes and my overpowering fatigue, I fell into a dreamless slumber in the twinkling of an eye. Sevrance asserts that the case was the same with him. I doubt if a thunderbolt falling squarely in either of the rooms would have roused us ere we had slept the appointed length of time.

I awoke in semidarkness, and for a few minutes lay drowsily speculating on my whereabouts, with an odd feeling that something was amiss. Mentally I was back in our cheerless quarters at the Rainbow.

Then, with a rush, the incidents of the preceding day crowded into my mind, and you may believe that I

was out of bed in two shakes, wide awake and anxious enough to be dressed and about, already foreseeing the long and intimate talk with Julia which I purposed should be mine some time during that day.

The shades were drawn at the windows, and the big room was quite gloomy. I could not even see the face of my watch distinctly. After hunting uselessly about for a match for a moment or two, I acted upon a sudden flash of intelligence and, going to the window, drew up the shades.

Broad sunlight streamed in, a golden flood athwart the floor. A day of surpassing beauty had dawned upon the land. The world lay quietly basking in the clear, cold glory of the sun. Above the naked treetops the sky was of a perfect azure, deep and rich; and so pure was the atmosphere after the storms and fog of the past two or three days that the horizon, formed by the upflung contour of the far inland chalk hills, loomed as precise and definite as though it had been but half a mile away.

From the chimney of the gate keeper's lodge, which I could just get a glimpse of through interstices in the intervening trees, a thin, white curl of smoke was slowly rising; in air so immaculately clear, it shone with a frosty glitter and seemed almost substantial. But, so far as I could determine from my window, which—you gather—looked toward the road, there was no one about.

Doubtless, I considered, they would be at breakfast. I tried to remember a call at my door, but without success. It struck me as odd that Grady had not summoned us in time to dress for the morning meal.

Abruptly I noticed that the sun was very high in

the heavens. From its position one would have judged the hour as near noon. Somewhat disturbed, I stepped back to the bureau and again took up my watch. To my infinite dismay the hands registered the hour of one in the afternoon.

I stood listening intently; it struck me that the Hall was strangely silent for so late an hour of the day. Surely some one should be about, the footsteps of the housekeeper or of the servants audible in those ancient, sounding corridors.

Alarmed, I rushed into Sevrance's room and pulled aside the curtains of his bed. He was sleeping peacefully, flat on his back, with one hand across his eyes.

A suspicion of the truth entered into my mind and made me cold with fear. I seized the unconscious man by the arm, uncovering his eyes, and shook him rudely, shouting in his ear.

Finally my efforts were rewarded by a muttered curse. The man stirred sleepily beneath the bedclothes and swore mumblingly at me in Grady's name. He did not wish to be disturbed, he announced, and I was discharged—could take my fortnight's notice.

In desperation I seized the bedding and flung it off him. Then, running to the washstand, I found a pitcher half full of icy water, and doused his head with it.

This treatment proved efficacious. Sevrance sat up with a howl and struck aimlessly at me. I threw him a towel from a safe distance and babbled of my fears.

He sat on the edge of the bed, resentful and sullen, alternately rubbing the sleep out of his eyes and the water out of his hair. In the end he delivered himself of a deliberate opinion.

"Didn't wake us, eh? And you're hopping mad, are you? Well, now, I call it uncommon considerate of 'em. You go on into your own room and dress, and don't be such an everlasting bally ass, Gordon!"

Nevertheless, I noticed he was not a minute behind me in getting into his clothes. I stepped out of my room, pulling on my coat, to find Sevrance in similar plight. He wore a perturbed frown, and met my gaze with a level, questioning glance.

"Devilish odd, you know!" he admitted grudgingly. "Come along, then."

I was first at the door; I grabbed the knob and pulled, but the door stuck fast. "Where's the key?" I demanded frantically.

"The key? I had no key, Gordon!"

"What!"

I rushed into my room, the door of which likewise opened upon the hall. That is to say, under ordinary circumstances it was to be expected to open upon the hall. In this case it imitated the example of Sevrance's, and remained obstinately closed.

I gave up yanking at the knob and turned to Sevrance.

"Now, who's the bally ass?" I demanded angrily, ready to pick a quarrel with my best friend on earth.

"We both are," he considered. "I think we're born fools. Can't you pull that infernal knob off?"

"No," I said, in blank despair. "They've got us fast for the time being. We're tricked—duped!"

"Neatly," he grumbled. "That toddy—you remember—Chine gave it to Grady?"

"What's become of Grady, then?" I asked. "Have they made way with him?"

"Devil a bit do I know, Gordon. I should not be surprised at anything, now. But I'll stake everything on Grady's loyalty. It's likely that hot toddy did for him, as for us. Here, now, let's think a minute. There must be a bell. Surely the servants will answer——"

He darted across the room and pulled furiously at a silken bell rope which hung from the ceiling. Listening attentively at the door, I fancied that I heard a faint, far jangling. But, otherwise, there was no response. Though we waited ever so long, there came no echo of footsteps in the corridor without.

After some time Sevrance succeeded in breaking the bell pull. He was for going into the farther room and practicing upon the one there, but I dissuaded him.

"What's the use of that? No one will answer. You're only wasting energy. They have locked us up for a purpose, and we're not to be let out until they're ready."

"We'll see about that!" cried Sevrance savagely, running to the window and jerking up the sash with a bang.

A flood of brisk air streamed in as he leaned forth. I joined him.

"Well?"

"Thirty-foot clear drop to the ground, and a tangle of cucumber frames to break your fall at that," he snapped. "This settles it. I can't say that I am pleased with the prospect of violating the laws of hospitality, so far as involves the guest, Gordon, you know, but——"

I could see that he had an idea, and I let him alone, merely assuming an expectant expression.

"But you know," he continued, expostulating in an argumentative tone, shaking his finger under my nose, "there are certain responsibilities that devolve upon the host. Now, with all due respect to Lady Herbert——"

He approached the door again, drawing his revolver.

"What are you going to do?"

"Blow the lock off," he announced grimly.

He put the muzzle in line with the keyhole, turned his head away, and pulled the trigger.

There was a crashing detonation—the revolver's report magnified by the narrow confines of the room—and a splintering, smashing sound, mingled with the tinkle of metal. A cloud of smoke hung about Sevrance, through which I could see him tugging madly at the knob.

He swore angrily. "These infernal old houses," he gasped, half choked with the sulphurous fumes, "were built to stand forever. This lock is like a rock."

The next instant he had fired again. This time the report was coincident with a tremendous smash, and the door swung slowly open, the lock ripped entirely out of place.

"There you are!" exclaimed Sevrance, waving me out into the hall.

I preceded him, glancing narrowly up and down the long corridor, my heart in my mouth and my fingers instinctively reaching for the butt of my own revolver.

Sevrance caught my arm as I turned, detaining me.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Search the place."

"To what end? They're gone. They've proved that entirely."

"How?"

"Do you suppose," he argued impatiently, "that a racket like that could break out in an inhabited house and fail to bring every living soul to see what was up? No. You can make up your mind to it. They're gone."

"You're right, I reckon."

"Of course I am right, Gordon. Another thing that proves it, they locked us in, but they didn't take the trouble to remove our weapons—not even to unload them. Why? Because they knew that by the time we got over the effects of Dr. Chine's sleeping potion they would be too far away to care whether or not we happened to be armed."

"Then why did they lock——"

"In case something should go wrong while they were taking French leave. Suppose one of us had happened to wake up? What then? Come along—it's no use shilly-shallying here. We'll interview Thompson."

His reasoning seemed well founded. I fell in with it, grumbling.

"What do you suppose caused it? Why should they go this way? It's not like Julia, Tony, to treat us in this cavalier fashion."

"You forget that they play the dickens of a desperate game, Gordon. They have no time to stand upon ceremony. Chances are that Holzborn didn't give her leisure to think."

"Yes," I contended, "but Holzborn—how was he to travel, wounded as he was?"

"A ruse, a feint to trick us this way, to get us for-

ever out of the game. He had no means of putting us out of it altogether without a row. That would mean a final break with Julia, more than probably. He chose this course—hoodwinked us as completely as though we were children! We were lulled and soothed into peaceful slumber, and then he, with his serious bodily injuries, assumed for the purpose, got out of bed, dressed, and superintended the flight."

By then we were descending the broad main staircase of the house. At the bottom, where it turned into the hall, I stopped, resisting Sevrance's impatient tug at my arm.

"Hold on! Listen! What's that?"

I held up a hand, imploring silence. He stopped stock-still; in an instant there was complete silence about us, broken by a far, rasping sound, as regular and persistent as that of a rusty saw methodically cutting through a tough oak plank.

"What is that?" I confess I was unable to attribute the noise to any human agency.

Sevrance solved it instantly, however: "Snoring! Grady, for a shilling!"

"I can't take that wager." I was already convinced.

Treading lightly, we followed the sound, hunted it down to its source, which we found with his head upon a table in the main dining hall, asleep in a chair.

It was Grady, even as Sevrance had surmised; Grady drugged and dead to the wide world. A whisky bottle, half full, a couple of empty soda-water bottles, and a dry, dreg-stained glass at his elbow showed us the way of his undoing.

Sevrance shook the man vigorously by the collar as a terrier shakes a rat. The only response he got was a couple of muffled snorts. It became plain that Grady had succumbed to double the dose which had been administered to us, at the least. It was impossible to do anything with him.

Nevertheless, between the two of us we contrived to get him to the front door, where we plumped him down in the open air, hoping that it might help to revive him.

There was no time to be lost; we felt that our doubts, our hopes and fears must be resolved at once, else we should go mad with anxiety—and chagrin. Together we ran down the winding carriage drive to the gate keeper's lodge, deriving an immense benefit from the exercise in the fresh, cold air. It was like a morning draught of wine to me, for one; I felt stronger physically and mentally, fitter to cope with difficulties, when at length we had come to the lodge.

The door was wide, and within we could see Thompson moving about, wielding a broom with all imaginable composure. He was house cleaning in his primitive way, and immensely astonished to hear our hail.

"Lor' bless ye, Mr. Sevrance, sir!" he cried, coming out to stand in the doorway, the incarnation of surprise. "Why be ye not with her leddyship?"

"Where? With her ladyship? What do you mean?"

The man's gaunt and weather-beaten face was lined with perplexity.

"It be more nor I can fathom," he complained. "Mrs. Mixon, the housekeeper, sir, came out and woke me up at two this morning to tell me that her leddyship

and her leddyship's party were agoin' to leave on the yacht right then, sir, without waitin' for mornin', sir. Mrs. Mixon, she said how as she was instructed to close the Hall, sir, and go away with both servants, sir, and to say nothing whatever about the matter upon pain of dismissal, sir. So she went. I surely thought ye both of the party, sir."

Sevrance and I exchanged glances of mutual understanding. He had been right in his deductive reasoning, then.

"We were left behind, with Grady," said Sevrance. "What time did you say it was?"

"After two in the mornin', sir; I see them all come out of the house together and go down toward the cliffs, sir. Mrs. Mixon and the servants was already gone. The lights was all out, sir, and I heard some one lock the main door when the last were leaving."

"That is strange," I said to Sevrance; "the door was not locked——"

"No matter. Thompson is mistaken. Come along —we'll make sure of this."

I saw that he meant the cliffs, and fell in at his side. With a word or two to Thompson about returning shortly, we set out at a sharp trot around the house and swung into a broad avenue of trees, at the farthest end of which a patch of blue water shone like a sapphire. This was the way, I recognized, by which we had gained the Hall the previous night. Nor was it short. On the contrary, it took us a good twenty minutes to reach the top of the landing.

Here all was as we might have expected to find it —deserted. Beyond a trampled area of dead grass,

scarcely a vestige of the night's conflict remained to testify to the reality of our experience. Only that area, where the fight had taken place, a dried, blackish spot or two upon the grass, marks of muddy feet upon the landing and stairs, and one cruel-looking poniard, which I stumbled upon by accident, were there to prove the adventure something more than a nightmare vision.

From cape to cape the little cove yawned wide, empty of sail or ship; on the farthest arm the lighthouse stood out prominent, rigid and austere of contour.

Far, far out on the waters, that nearer in were dotted with the dingy sails of fishing vessels, a murky trail of smoke hung low upon the horizon—dark and dirty against the new-washed purity of the day.

"You have the glasses?" I said to Sevrance.

He nodded silently, handing them to me from his coat pocket. I turned them upon that smear of smoke, faintly hoping that beneath its pall I might catch a glimpse of the white shape of the yacht. But I did not.

We were finally outwitted; the *Myosotis* was gone, bearing with it my Heart's Desire and all the burden of her distress; and no man might say whither.

Dejectedly we turned back toward the Hall.

CHAPTER XV

LOOKING BEFORE LEAPING

We slouched back slowly enough, our hearts heavy and sad, hope quite dead within us. As we approached the Hall we found Thompson anxiously waiting for us in the middle of the drive.

"Your man, Grady, sir," he told Sevrance, "was in a bad way. I took him down to the lodge, sir, and did what I could for him. He's in my bed now, sir."

"Did he wake up at all?" Sevrance asked listlessly.

"He was tryin' to, sir, when I found him. But he couldn't remember nothin'. I soused his head with cold water, sir—ice cold—and gave him some black coffee and put him to bed to sleep it off. He must ha' had a rare tight last night."

"He was drugged," Sevrance explained. "So we were—save that we must have been given a smaller dose of the stuff."

Indeed, we seemed to have gotten off cheaply. Neither Sevrance nor myself was conscious of any particularly ill effects; but Grady, when we saw him, showed up as broken as any man who ever put in a full week of hard drinking. His head was splitting, he assured us, and his mouth tasted desperate' bad. As for his nervous system it was an utter wreck, evidenced beyond question by his incoherence, his restless eye, and the palsy of his hands.

"Lave me slape till avenin'," he begged, "an' 'tis meself who will be a new man. 'Twas thot Dootch divvle, Fritz, thot egged me on to th' drink, sor. Shure, an' I'll niver forgive meself till I twist his ugly neck—may the black rot seize him! Will yer honor be afther forgivin' me, sor?"

"It is no matter, Grady," Sevrance told him kindly. "Rest and get yourself in shape. We return to the Rainbow to-night."

Thompson had prepared a meager breakfast—meager, although he plainly set before us the best of his larder; and of this we ate, more from a sense of duty than from desire. Later—it was then perhaps half after three—Sevrance proposed a return to Saltacres Hall.

"In our hurry to get out," he said, "I left my watch under my pillow. I want that and—well, we might as well as not look about. It is not inconceivable——"

"What?"

"That her ladyship may have left us something whereby we might trace her. She took that trouble once before. The housekeeper may have been intrusted with a note for you. She may have returned, or be now on her way."

"Confound it!" I cried exasperated. "Why tantalize me with false hopes, Tony?"

Nevertheless, his suggestion served to rouse me out of my gloom. I followed him with more interest up the carriage road to the Hall. It was a bare possibility—what he had hinted.

We opened the front door and stepped into the shadowed interior of the great, paneled, main hall. The

chill desolation of the place struck into my heart. Instinctively I felt assured that our quest was to prove fruitless. On the contrary, Sevrance debated aloud over a puzzling circumstance.

"Now, I asked Thompson again," he pondered, "and he is positive that he heard the door locked upon their backs. It was unlocked when we came down this morning. Doors don't unlock themselves, Gordon. Ergo, some one returned—eh?"

"He is mistaken," I doubted honestly.

Before the cold ashes of the great fireplace we paused by common consent. We were both keyed up to an usually high nervous pitch; and something in the bleak silence that held sway within the great deserted building rendered us strangely apprehensive. We felt, and for a while acted, like two frightened children who had, on exploration bent, strayed into such a place.

"Well?" I said finally, smiling forlornly into Sevrance's face.

"Listen!"

I fairly held my breath for a full minute, but beyond the beating of my heart I heard nothing. Still, Sevrance seemed unsatisfied, restraining my impatience with a commanding gesture.

"Wait!" he whispered. "Wait but a moment longer, Gordon. I am sure——"

The scampering of a mouse within the wainscoting startled me.

"That—!" I sneered contemptuously.

"Not—not that—but *that!*"

And then I, too, heard the sound which had caught his keen ears first—a faint, far, shrill tinkling. Our

eyes questioned one another fruitlessly, as we waited in a breathless silence for its repetition.

It came again, a mere thread of clear, fine sound. I could have imagined it the ghost of a telephone bell's sharp summons, had I not known that such a thing did not exist in the Hall. A slender, tremulous shiver of sound, it exchoed again and again, now seeming to seep up from the very bowels of the edifice, beneath our feet, now to come from the upper regions of the great house, now to be near at hand, now far distant.

We made nothing of it at all; and we stared one another almost out of countenance, bewildered, well-nigh alarmed.

"What can it be?" I asked, guarding my voice.

"God knows," said Sevrance devoutly. He stood for a moment, listening and meditating profoundly. "But I, for one, am going to find out before I leave this building!"

"I'm with you there."

"You should be," he said grimly. "But what the devil it means—that bothers me. Can it be that some one remains in this old house—locked in as we were—signaling somehow for release?"

"By Heaven!" I cried, grasping at an elusive hope. "You don't mean to say that you think——"

"It is possible," he averred cautiously. "Certainly something causes that noise—and we are not trained to suspect the supernatural."

"Has the Hall, then, a ghost?" I asked, laughing.

"I believe so—all Halls have, that are respectable and belong to the English aristocracy. But if it's the ghost that is making that racket, I can promise you it

shall endure a most uncomfortable quarter of an hour when I've run it to earth!"

"It is more probable," I debated, "that Holzborn chose to leave somebody else behind—Mrs. Morchester, for instance; or Eunice."

"We'll see. Come along."

As if to encourage us, the vibrating sound seemed suddenly to come from a point directly above our heads. Sevrance turned for the staircase.

"That settles it," he said sourly. "No ghost or mortal shall mock me so!"

Together we strode, walking lightly side by side, along the vacant, richly carpeted corridors of the second floor. There seemed to be miles of them; every few yards we would stop and listen, straining our hearing as we strained our sight against the shadows that already were gathering.

Now we heard it, seemingly near; now it taunted us, as from a distance. I dare say imagination had much to do with it—fancy strung to its highest tension, ready to take any hurdle in the whole steeplechase of impossibilities.

Door after door we opened, and again and again we were disappointed. From the more modern and the only inhabited portions of the building we passed into the older wings, where the spiders and the rats held high carnival in the inch-deep dust that had sifted down upon the floor in the passing of countless years. Here, by some accident, the alluring sound seemed still more clear, unearthly, and imperative. It persisted, also, strangely insistent; an intermittent disturbance of the sound waves, almost regularly punctuated with brief silences.

But nowhere did we seem able to surprise the source of it. And I'll confess to a feeling of incredulity and an uncomfortable conviction that we might better give it up than probe rashly too deep into so baffling and inscrutable a mystery, before at last success crowned our efforts.

Ready to abandon the search in despair, we had returned to the modern wings, and were lighting our way through the darkened corridors with a brace of candlesticks which we had found on a mantel in one room or another.

Near the main staircase we stopped before a closed room—one of those we had already passed without troubling to enter.

"Oh, come along with you!" I cried impatiently. "What's the use? This is all some wretched hoax——"

"We may as well see it through," said Sevrance slowly. He hesitated for a moment, then laughed apologetically. "It's the last—we'll look no farther. I—ah—I've an intuition. . . ."

Gently he turned the knob. The door swung inward. A heavy current of warm air, laden with the reek of drugs and antiseptics, greeted our nostrils: the close, pent atmosphere of a sick room. Sevrance held up a warning hand.

We tiptoed into a little anteroom, set apart from the farther bedchamber by a heavy *portière*. Sevrance shut the door cautiously behind him, and we stood in total darkness, listening with all our ears.

From the adjoining room there came the sound of bedclothing tossed restlessly and a man's stertorous breathing. And then the silence was further disturbed

by the sputtering of a match. A thin and feeble ray of light penetrated the darkness between the curtain and the doorway. A man's voice rose querulously:

"Curse that devil! Why doesn't he answer?"

Sevrance moved to the *portière* and noiselessly drew aside an edge of it. I saw him beckon to me, and peered over his shoulder.

I was looking directly toward a great, old-fashioned, canopied bed, whereon a man's figure was dimly distinguishable beneath a tumbled heap of sheets and coverlets. At the head of the bed stood a small table, whereon were bottles, glasses, spoons, a small clock, a revolver, a tobacco jar, and a match stand: the whole illuminated by the shaded light of a small lamp, which also fell athwart the face of the sick man.

As I watched, he groaned and swore again anxiously. Then, with visible effort, he moved sideways on the bed, stretched forth an arm, and pressed a push button, conveniently placed upon the wall. Again, faint but clear, I heard the far buzzing tinkle of the electric bell.

For it was that, palpably. In this more modern section of the house electric bells had been installed to replace the more antiquated system which we had found in our own bedrooms; the noise we heard was the signal of the annunciator in the basement.

Astonishingly simple—yes; but not so amazing as the identity of him who had caused the ringing. You, doubtless, will already have fixed upon the man's name. To me, on the other hand, it came as a distinct and stupefying revelation.

I had been thoroughly convinced that he was far,

far distant from Saltacres Hall, comfortable enough in his stateroom aboard the *Myosotis,* by this time. But here, with the yellow lamplight strong upon his heavy jowls, black-shaded with a day's growth of beard, lay Captain Kurd von Holzborn—of all living men!

I voiced my amazement in a muttered exclamation, which caught the quick ears of the Prussian. He turned his head, staring intently at the doorway. Perhaps he saw the curtain quiver, for he lifted his brows, then dropped them and scowled blackly.

"Fritz, you devil!" he cried angrily. "Is that you? What have you been doing with your worthless self? Here have I been ringing for the past hour, and you—" He paused, puzzled.

"Why the devil don't you answer, you dunderhead?" he cried.

By way of doing so, Sevrance obligingly pulled aside the *portière.* I stalked into the room, he following. Von Holzborn's jaw dropped.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VILLAIN SHOWS HIS HAND

But the Prussian's surprise by no means approximated consternation. He lost nothing of his self-possession. To the contrary, he brought his teeth together with a satisfied snap and quietly moved a hand toward the revolver upon the table.

Sevrance dropped into a chair and crossed his knees nonchalantly. Without ostentation, but so suddenly that it seemed as if the work of magic, he caused a revolver to appear in his hand.

"Don't do that, Captain," he said evenly.

The Prussian smiled insolently. Very deliberately he moved his fingers onto the match safe and selected a match, which he used to relight his huge, china-bowled pipe. Puffing soberly, he looked at us with an amused quiver of the brows, his opaque and enigmatic eyes shifting from Sevrance's face to mine, and back again. In time a little drift of smoke blurred his features; but his eyes shone through it like coals, steadfastly regarding us.

I followed my friend's example and selected a chair. Words did not immediately come to me. To be frank, I hardly knew what to say first. There were a number of matters clamoring for settlement and discussion, one as important as another. So I held quiet, trying to

readjust my conception of things to this new and astounding development.

Von Holzborn remained imperturbable, with the attitude of a man who finds silence as much to his taste as conversation with fellows beneath his social position. He concluded his scrutiny with a sigh, and thereafter took to staring with interest at the design of the canopy above the bed.

Presently Sevrance rose with a short laugh, stalked over to the table, and pocketed the Prussian's revolver, immediately putting his own weapon out of sight.

Von Holzborn turned his head slightly, saw what Sevrance had done, and nodded complacently.

"Thank you," he said placidly. "That is something in the nature of a relief. I am a sick man, with nerves—for the first time in my life, I believe. It annoyed me, to have that gun pointed at my head. I feel better now."

"Glad of it," returned Sevrance coolly. "Anything else I can do for you?"

"Kindly see to the fire," suggested Von Holzborn. "It needs stirring up a bit. I am shivering. You'll find coals in the hod in the corner there."

Already the room was suffocatingly close, to my mind; but the fire had, beyond doubt, died down; a thin film of ash was forming over the embers. Sevrance obligingly poked it to a blaze, and then smothered it with a dose of anthracite.

"Anything else?" he inquired mildly.

"I should like a drink. You'll find a glass of whisky and water on the table there. Thanks!" Von Holzborn took a huge swallow of the mixture and

smacked his lips with appreciation. "That fool, Fritz," he complained, "has been gone a good three hours. What the devil do you think has happened to him? Here I've been alone, freezing, perishing of thirst, and Fritz nowhere in sight! I shall have to get rid of the idiot."

Sevrance glanced at me, smiling. "Jocular dog," he commented; "our friend, there—the German—will have his little joke."

"That's unkind, gentlemen," protested the scoundrel. "Here am I, wounded nigh unto death——"

Sevrance abruptly sat down heavily upon the edge of the bed. Von Holzborn groaned, his eyes contracting. "Ah-h!" he grimaced. "My friend, you would oblige me by not jouncing about so unexpectedly. I've a hole in my shoulder and it is painful."

"I apologize," said Sevrance. "I had forgotten the serious nature of your wound. Can I make amends in any way?"

Satisfied that the Prussian was not shamming—a suspicion to which I also was a party—he arose.

Von Holzborn, with closed eyes, shook his head. "Nothing," he said faintly—or, rather, moaned. "One moment," he continued, "and I can talk with you. Ah!"

He opened his eyes again. Sevrance took a turn up and down the room, his hands clasped behind his back, frowning thoughtfully.

"Where are the ladies?" he demanded abruptly, stopping to look down into the Prussian's face.

"Gone," said Von Holzborn calmly. "Gone where you will not follow and—interfere."

"In the *Myosotis?*" I asked.

He turned his heavy-lidded eyes upon me. "In the *Myosotis*," he agreed.

"Bound?" Sevrance inquired curtly.

"I don't mind telling you," returned Von Holzborn agreeably. "If you'll oblige me with that glass again." He took another long draught. "If either of you care to join me, you'll find a bottle on the dressing table, I believe. No? Very well. Ah! yes"—noticing my movement of impatience—"you wish to know whither the yacht is bound?"

"I do," said I sullenly, furious with my plight: to have the fellow helpless, at my mercy, and yet be forced to endure his insolence——

"St. Petersburg!"

"Where?" I cried, jumping to my feet.

Von Holzborn repeated it deliberately. "If you hurry, you'll be able to join Lady Herbert at the docks, I've no doubt."

"That, of course, is a lie," said I, resuming my seat.

"You should be able to judge," he insinuated.

"You mean by that——"

"That the man who asserted that he had not heard from Lady Herbert, and then proved that he lied by coming direct to Saltacres, is a judge of the handy art of fabrication—to put it mildly, *mon ami*."

"And what," I asked steadily, though mentally staggered by the directness—and the truth—of his indictment, "if I should declare to you that I got no word from Lady Herbert?"

He removed the pipe from his lips and laughed briefly. "And yet—you are here."

"You, I believe," I continued, determined to beat

him down, "took the trouble to perjure yourself, first of all. You informed me that you were bound for Portsmouth—all of you."

"And so we were."

"Permit me to suggest," Sevrance put in, "that there is room for doubt in your statement."

"How so?"

"We are willing to admit, to begin with, that Lady Herbert and Mrs. Morchester joined the *Myosotis* at Portsmouth, when the yacht was put into commission. But you, Captain, and Monsieur de Netze?"

The Prussian did not reply, but kept a steady gaze upon Sevrance. My friend had hit at random; it seemed that his chance shot was nonplusing to Von Holzborn.

"Where shall we say that you two joined the yacht?" Sevrance continued. "At Folkstone—eh?"

The wounded man frowned. "Tell me frankly," he said abruptly, "how much you know."

"That's enough," Sevrance said decidedly. "The point is that you lied. Under the circumstances we are not to be blamed for doubting your word, for coming here instead of attempting to find you at Portsmouth. Your very statement that you were going there was enough to make us suspicious. Be advised by me and——"

"What?"

"Tell the truth—then none will believe you."

"*Hein!*" he laughed. "Well touched. Then"—turning upon me again—"you deny absolutely that you heard from Lady Herbert?"

I saw that he was not to be diverted. The issue was

plain, and not to be evaded. Remembering Julia's warning, I was deaf to the voice of honesty. I looked him squarely in the eye and lied, I hope, like a gentleman:

"I deny it absolutely."

"Good. I believe you. Yet you were very sagacious—permit me to compliment you—so to track us down here."

I held silence. Sevrance took up the examination.

"Will you tell me what has taken her ladyship to St. Petersburg?"

"A due regard for the safety of Monsieur de Netze. Surely the events of the last week or so must have made it plain, even to you, that the man's life hangs on a thread here in England. He was confronted with the alternative of leaving or assassination—and he chose wisely."

"Why did he abandon you, then?"

"At my desire."

"And her ladyship—your *fiancée*?"

"Ah, you weary me!" He smiled inscrutably into the cloud of pipe smoke. "Indeed, I am not anxious to tell all I know."

"And we," I pursued, "were locked up in order that you might be rid of us?"

"You have fathomed the mystery," he admitted, with irony.

"I wish," said Sevrance softly, "that I could make you tell the truth, Holzborn!"

"You will find it difficult," he returned candidly. "I don't repose confidence in my enemies. Now, if you will be kind enough to leave, at your convenience, I will try to get some rest. I am weary."

He put the pipe aside and turned his face to the wall. "At your convenience," he repeated. "And, by the way, if that fool, Fritz, turns up, tell him I want him —will you?"

Sevrance looked at me helplessly. "What can I do?" I read in his expression. I replied similarly, dolefully: "Nothing." Neither of us made a move to go. For some moments there was a degree of silence in the room. Von Holzborn breathed heavily and regularly, apparently oblivious and indifferent to our presence.

In the end Sevrance spoke.

"Curse you!" he cried, his tone trembling with the passion of the exasperated. "Can I do nothing? God, I've a mind to throttle you!"

"You cannot threaten a dying man with death," the Prussian observed, without moving.

"When will her ladyship return?" I asked.

He made no sign of having heard me.

"Will you not answer?"

He did not, at all events.

I clenched my fists in the extremity of my wrath. It was unendurable thus to be defied by him who lay at my mercy. But what could I do?

Sevrance abruptly caught my eye and nodded brightly. I saw that he had evolved a scheme.

"Holzborn," he began gently.

"Well?"

"What do you want of us?"

"Eh? What? I want of *you?*" He laughed scornfully.

"Precisely," continued Sevrance, apparently sure of himself. "I can inform you that you have not deceived

me. This business has been arranged for the express purpose of hoodwinking us. You were expecting us when you heard us enter—and pretended not to notice. You expected us when you left the outer door unlocked. In a word, you are playing a part—and for a purpose concerning us. You arranged this talk to further your ends. Come, now, let us have it."

The Prussian rolled his head over upon the pillow and stared at Sevrance for a full minute, unwinking. In the end he made a slight affirmative motion—scarcely could it be called a nod.

"You are an intelligent man," he conceded amiably. "I had not looked for so much penetration. So! I confess: you are correct in your surmise."

"Very well, let us have no more beating about the bush."

"You will regard this as confidential?"

"Absolutely," said Sevrance; and I added my assurance.

"I am forced to put you upon your honor. Grave issues are involved."

"That is understood—and we are waiting."

"So, then!" He took a deep breath, appearing to collect his thoughts. "You see me here, gentlemen, incapacitated for action. Netze, as you understand, is a marked man; he can do nothing in England. There remains a work to be put through, and that quickly. In a word, we need help. I am asking yours."

"On what grounds?" I asked.

"It shall be a community of interests. We will not haggle over the issues, but be straightforward. Frankly, Mr. Traill, you wish to marry Lady Herbert?"

Somewhat abashed, I murmured an affirmative.

"And I," continued Von Holzborn—"I will make no bones about it. The matter, so far as affects me, is that of a brilliant and successful marriage. Julia is rich—very. I am a poor Prussian captain. I need money; her ladyship has it. We agree to marry. Well!"

"You scoundrel!" I broke out furiously.

"Indeed, Mr. Traill? Then you reject my overtures?" I was doggedly silent. "Or do you wish to debate the ethics of the case? *Hein?* Have I not put it plainly before you?"

"Get on with your proposition," I growled.

"Then don't interrupt," he retorted sharply. "To proceed: A certain work is to be accomplished in the interests of the Russian Government. I will inform you that I am associated with De Netze by order of his Majesty the German Emperor; I am directed to render all discreet assistance. You comprehend? In short, I have pledged myself to carry the business through. It must be done. It means much to me: money, honors, ultimate advancement. Deeply as I am now involved, I cannot withdraw my hand; the end must be accomplished—successfully, of course. . . .

"So! I make the proposition. In my inability to get about you will take my place. You are, comparatively, free from suspicion. You can do that which I could not. You push the matter to a successful end—I reap the reward and resign my claim to her ladyship's hand. Do you comprehend?"

"Plainly," I muttered. "We play the rôle of the cat's-paw."

"Not to put too fine a point upon it—you do." He waited a moment, searching our faces with his unreadable gaze. "You gain your end—I gain one and relinquish one of mine. Are we agreed?"

"Not so fast," Sevrance demurred. "Let us consider all sides of the case, Traill."

"By all means," consented the Prussian.

"In the first place, what is the nature of this 'business' of which you speak?"

He smiled. "That I cannot reveal until we have come to a complete understanding. Give me your word that you will do all things in your power, and under my direction, to carry it to a successful issue—and tonight, at eight o'clock, I will take you completely in my confidence."

"Why the delay?" I asked curiously.

"That I may signal the *Myosotis*, now standing off the coast, waiting for information. If I signal 'All's well,' the yacht proceeds upon its course, avoiding danger. If otherwise—if you refuse, I am forced to threaten you—Lady Herbert will return at an agreed time and again become involved in dangers and perils far more desperate than those you know of."

"And you permit that—you, who would marry her!" I cried.

"I have no choice. I must use whatever tools come to my hand, without regard to sentiment."

"Tell me one thing, then," I pleaded. "What is the nature of your power over her? What makes her bend to your will—now? God knows the woman hates you."

"And I know it, too," he returned, without a flicker

of an eyelash. "But I would be a great fool to show you my trump card, gentlemen."

The truth of that observation was so plain that I could not argue against it. I bowed my head, struggling to suppress the flame of my smoldering resentment.

"For your own comfort, however," he continued in honeyed tones, "I will confess one thing to you. Lady Herbert to-day gives not one fond thought to your humble servant. I might make a shrewd guess as to the man so fortunate as to bask in the light of her favor—but I refrain. On the other hand, I would not be cruel."

Something beneath the sound of his words puzzled me. I did not quite understand, and watched him keenly while he fumbled beneath his pillow. Presently, in his own good time, he brought forth an envelope.

"Here is a note addressed to Mr. Gordon Traill," he drawled irritatingly. "It is sealed—and yet I might suggest the identity of its fair author, if I would."

He gave it a twist of his fingers, sneering contemptuously, and the note skimmed across the floor, falling at my feet. I had it in my fingers in an instant, trembling with an uncontrollable agitation; for at the first glance I had recognized the handwriting of Heart's Desire.

Impatiently I broke the wax and drew forth the single sheet of faintly fragrant paper it contained.

Undated, it read, four square pages hurriedly penned:

"Gordon, if you would aid me—and I believe you desire to do so; I could not write this did I not hold firm to that belief

—please, ah, please do not misconstrue my actions. Through no will of my own I am forced to leave you and return to the *Myosotis*. I cannot help it. *It must be.* What will happen next I cannot foresee, but oh, Gordon, may God have us in His keeping!

"Captain von Holzborn tells me that he will make you a certain proposition. I cannot advise you to trust the man, for none can appreciate his faithlessness better than I; yet in this instance I believe he will keep faith.

"If, then, you can see your way to an acceptance, bearing in mind the reward he offers, the penalty he exacts, I would say to you, 'Accept!'—were I but sure that it was fair and right to you.

"I am—I cannot find words to say with what burden of sorrow and anxiety,

"JULIA."

I pondered long over this, sensible to the unmistakable genuineness of its appeal, as honest and straightforward as her own dear heart.

So far as I was concerned, the matter stood already settled. I must consent to undertake whatever task Von Holzborn might set to my hand. The man had laid siege to me cunningly enough, withholding his heaviest ammunition until the final assault. Despite her expressed doubts, Julia had left me no course to pursue save to accept and dare whatever dangers such acceptance might entail.

At length I looked up, to find Sevrance waiting with a show of impatience. Silently I handed him the note. He read it through without a sign, and then, returning it, asked openly:

"It is her own hand? You are sure?"

"Certain," I affirmed.

"Inspired, do you think?" he pursued, with a sideways nod toward the Prussian.

"I think not," I said.

It appeared that he had come to the same conclusion as myself; he faced Von Holzborn.

"I, for one, accept," he announced stiffly.

The Prussian looked to me.

"And I."

"Ah-h!" he sighed tremulously, sinking back upon his pillow.

With the triumphant consummation of his desires, he practically keeled over, played out, lying as limp as a rag, as motionless as a stone.

Sevrance solicitously hurried to his side. The Prussian, half conscious, whispered for the whisky and water, which Sevrance helped him to drink, supporting his huge torso with a gentle arm about the shoulders.

Von Holzborn lay back, sighing again profoundly.

"Now, go," he said in a tone so thin and strained that it sounded, by contrast, like a child's piping treble. "Go," he whispered, "and let me rest. You'll find Fritz at the foot of the stairs. Send him. Come back around eight——"

Sevrance and I hurried from the room. As the door closed, Sevrance paused to light his candle. The flame, gaining strength, brought out his strong, clear features in high relief against the background of darkness, velvety and impenetrable.

His eyes, meeting mine, were filled with a profound wonder.

"I am damned!" he confessed blankly.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DARKNESS MADE LIGHT

The night air was cold and still. A heavy frost was settling upon the countryside. No wind stirred, and the quiet was intense; in it distant sounds attained a delusive magnitude. The barking of a dog miles away came to us with wonderful distinctness. We walked in silence, up and down on the driveway near the lodge, within the gates, each deep in meditation, the gravel crunching briskly beneath our feet. After a long interval, Sevrance drew my attention to a light moving within the Hall.

"He spoke of a signal," said my friend. "Perhaps——"

There was no need to add anything. Upon the word we set off toward the house. The light—evidently that of a hand lantern—was visible through the windows of the lower floor. It moved hither and thither, and in the end abruptly approached the door, which was heard to close gently. Then there was the sound of feet upon the piazza, ending in a thud as a man leaped lightly to the ground.

We followed the light, which made off at a swinging pace down the avenue of trees that led to the sea, the two of us dogging it closely, satisfied that the man who carried it was none other than Fritz.

If he heard us following, he did not pause to investigate. Very likely Von Holzborn had warned him that we would be on the lookout; we made no attempt to walk silently, but Fritz kept on swiftly until he had reached the landing.

Here, however, he stopped, and began to busy himself mysteriously, placing the lantern on the ground at some distance inland. Sevrance and I walked boldly to his side, but he paid us no attention.

I failed to understand precisely what he was about, but it was soon made clear. After he had arranged everything to his satisfaction, the man produced a box of fusees, struck one, shielding it with his hollowed palms against the slight airs that breathed in from the sea, and touched the light to something which he had placed on the rail of the stairway, at the same time stepping quickly back.

A broad, red flame leaped high in the air with a roaring sound, brightly illuminating the little space about us, making the radiance from the lighthouse in comparison seem pale and puny. Sevrance and I started back, slightly surprised, half blinded. Fritz stolidly turned aside and ignited two other flares at distances of twenty feet one from another. When all were blazing full they formed a rough triangle.

Fritz shaded his eyes against the glare and gazed steadily out to sea. The lights flamed high, sizzling loudly, vacillated, and finally died. For some minutes there was both silence and darkness about us, quite unrelieved—darkness rendered the more impressive by the sudden subsidence of the flares; silence heightened by the tension of waiting.

The answer presently came—three brilliant rockets, soaring in flaming arcs, far out at sea. Fritz grunted satisfaction and lit another flare, this time of blue light. When it had disappeared, two more rockets darted toward the zenith.

Without noticing us, the man turned sharply about and made for Saltacres Hall. From this, concluding that the pyrotechnics were over for the evening, we followed, gradually permitting the lantern to gain upon us. When he was out of earshot Sevrance spoke.

"Our future ally, Von Holzborn," he mused aloud, "has a decided genius for organization. He sees far ahead, and makes his plans accordingly—with a most infernal ingenuity. I confess I'd like to know just what those signals spelled out to De Netze and the others on the yacht."

"We'll have to take them on their face value," I said, "for what the Prussian says they mean."

"Of course. But I distrust him, Gordon; I distrust him!"

"And I no less than you," I told him stoutly. "Notwithstanding that fact, I have put my hand to the plow, and I'm not going to turn back."

"We're agreed there," he pledged himself, with a hearty handclap on my shoulder. "Whither thou goest," he laughed, "there go I—we'll see this thing through to the finish."

Von Holzborn was ready for us when we knocked. Fritz opened instantly, waved us respectfully into the farther apartment, and unostentatiously sidled out.

His master was reclining, as before, propped up in the bed by a number of pillows. He seemed to be suf-

fering severely from his wound. But he made no complaint, and with a frank brutality rejected our—I admit somewhat forced and stilted—expressions of sympathy.

"We'll waive all that and consider it said," he suggested. "This is a business matter, pure and simple. We'll transact it without frills. I am aware that you would gladly see the last of me—just as gladly as I will of you, when we've come to the end of the passage. Frankly, I despise you both heartily, even as you despise me, and the sooner we are agreed and parted, the happier for all concerned."

"We'll subscribe to those sentiments unreservedly," I told him, without resentment. "And now?"

"And 'now into the breech,' dear friends. You'll find cigars on the dresser. Settle yourselves. This is likely to be a long conference—longer than I might wish. Still, 'needs must when the devil drives.' You concur?" He grinned maliciously.

"We concur," stated Sevrance solemnly.

He took a chair in the shadow, and I followed his example. Von Holzborn puffed at his china pipe and appeared to cogitate deeply.

"You've no intention of backing out?" he asked bluntly.

"Not in the least. You are to state the case," I said, "and we will do our part."

"Word of honor, you understand?"

"You are dealing with gentlemen," asserted Sevrance.

"Well and good. We understand one another thoroughly." He laughed as though immensely pleased with himself. "Well, honor among thieves," he murmured

philosophically. "You're ready for anything, I suppose?"

"Highway robbery and arson by preference," said Sevrance, falling in with his humor. "But we shan't balk at homicide, kidnapping, or barratry—upon one condition."

"You pledged yourselves unconditionally," said Von Holzborn quickly.

"Then we retract, and pledge ourselves anew conditionally."

"Well, what is it, then?" growled the scoundrel.

"It is understood that nothing which you may ask us to do will react upon England—that the project will involve her in no foreign difficulties."

"Make your minds easy on that score. You will be obliged to violate the laws of neutrality and shatter a few clauses of the Decalogue, perhaps, but no more."

"Fire away, then."

Von Holzborn settled himself comfortably, pulled once or twice at his pipe, and scowled into the smoke.

"The Russian Government," he said, "has purchased through our friend, De Netze, a yacht—a small vessel built for speed, and convertible."

"A torpedo boat?" Sevrance inferred sharply.

"It might be used as a torpedo boat, should occasion arise. In fact, I am able to inform you that a number of torpedoes form part of the cargo of the vessel, and it is provided with the regulation number of tubes—masked. In short, should the vessel get out of English waters, she could be transformed into a lively little torpedo boat at a moment's notice."

"I see."

"Naturally, you undoubtedly appreciate that it would be a violation of the law of nations for England to permit such a craft to be transferred to the Russian agents. For that reason the negotiations have been conducted with the utmost regard for secrecy. Nevertheless, the agents of the Russian Revolutionary Party have winded the affair. What the vessel is, where concealed —they suspect. But they know nothing positively; they have not enough to go upon to warrant their lodging information with the authorities. You follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"They have even managed to discover—by what means we cannot tell—that Netze was the ostensible purchaser. For that reason they have dogged his steps persistently, attempted to assassinate him, or to capture him alive—in order that they might secure the papers and other necessary information in the case. It would be madness for him to attempt getting the vessel out of England. For that purpose my services were demanded. Unfortunately, as you understand, I have become too closely identified with the affair—and you see the result."

He smiled grimly, continuing: "It will, therefore, be your part to secure the services of a competent crew —particularly of an engineer and a navigator—men upon whom you can rely to take their pay and keep their lips tight—and to steal the vessel and run it to Libau, where you will deliver it to the Russian authorities."

He made the statement quietly, with no emphasis, with nothing to indicate that he considered the proposition anything out of the ordinary. As for me, it fairly

took my breath away—the audacity of the conception, the magnitude of the task. For Sevrance, however, it plainly offered alluring possibilities. I saw him flush with excitement, and his eyes shone with the light of his enthusiasm.

Yet, "Is that all?" he questioned, as though disappointed.

"That is all. You will have plenty of difficulties to encounter and to overcome, with a multitude of dangers which cannot be overestimated. If caught in the act, you'll spend some valuable time in an English prison; if you permit yourselves to be overhauled by a British war ship, a cruiser, or a destroyer, of the Channel Squadron, you will probably be blown out of the water. You will, in short, run the gantlet from Barmouth to Libau on the Baltic—and if you get through unscathed, I shall be surprised."

"Or disappointed?" I put in.

"Both," he said curtly. "There, in a nutshell, is the situation you have to face, gentlemen. And now for particulars." He lay quiescent for a space, smiling inscrutably.

"And now for details," he resumed. "The yacht lies at anchor at Barmouth, already thoroughly equipped, ready in every respect to undertake a long sea voyage —coal in her bunkers, ballast and cargo in her hold. Every detail of her fitting out has been looked to with a careful eye. You will want for nothing of your complement—save men. Those you must engage at your discretion—that alone is your affair.

"The shipyard is that of Rogers & Greer—you will note the name. Greer is the man with whom you

deal. You will go to his office, give him the countersign with which I shall acquaint you presently, show him the bill of sale and other papers I shall hand you, and inform him of the day and hour when you will be ready to steal the *Clymene*—that is the present name of the yacht. Greer will have all ready for you when the time comes. You——"

"Why do you say 'steal'?" I asked. "If it is sold and ready for delivery——"

"You forget that the law prohibits the sale of war vessels to foreign nations which happen to be at war at the time of sale. To protect the owners, the builders, Rogers & Greer, it will be essential that the yacht be taken from them with a show of force. The matter must be reported and commented upon as a robbery. It will take place at midnight, by preference. You, with your crew, will break into the yards, overpower the watchmen—who will be paid for permitting themselves to be overpowered without serious resistance—and make way with the vessel before the authorities get wind of the affair. Do you comprehend fully?

"Now as to funds. You will need money. In the inside pocket of the coat hanging on the back of that chair you will find notes—Bank of England—to the amount of two thousand pounds. This will serve for all preliminary expenses, such as the engaging of the crew. Everything else is provided for. You will also find a wallet containing the papers I have mentioned."

Sevrance rose and investigated the indicated coat pocket, offering the contents to Holzborn, who waved them gently back.

"Keep them," he said; "they are now yours. The

countersign which I have mentioned is one word, 'Cronstadt'—you will find it an all-sufficient introduction. If, during your stay in Barmouth, or at any other time before the date of sail, you are approached by a man with that word, you will understand that he is one of our agents. To make quite sure, ask him the time of the day. If he replies 'Midnight,' you will be able to repose every confidence in him, to rely upon him for every aid within his power to give you. That, I think, is about all—the rest is in your hands. When shall you be able to make the passage, do you calculate?"

Von Holzborn seemed to address me; I looked to Sevrance. The latter knitted his brows thoughtfully. After a moment or two—

"Within one week from to-day," he announced with decision.

"That will be fast work," the Prussian commented.

"It will be done by then—or not at all," Sevrance promised, with more confidence, I confess, than I found warrant for.

"One question," I interposed, seeing that Von Holzborn considered the matter settled. "As to the final outcome—if we succeed——"

"Well?" asked the Prussian impatiently.

"As to Lady Herbert and the *Myosotis*? It is our agreement that you surrender all rights to her ladyship's hand, release her from her engagement. What assurance have we——"

"You will find all information on such points in the paper in the wallet," he said. "For your personal satisfaction, I may inform you that it is arranged that the *Myosotis*, with Monsieur de Netze and Lady Herbert

on board, will stand off the mouth of the bar from midnight to dawn of every day during the coming fortnight. You will announce the success of the attempt by means of a single rocket, to be sent up at a point two miles offshore. The *Myosotis* will respond with two rockets, whereupon you will show a red flare on the port bow. The *Myosotis* will then join the *Clymene* and convoy her to Libau. With your glasses and the signal code you will have no difficulty in assuring yourselves that Lady Herbert is aboard. If such is not the case —you are masters of the situation. You have but to turn around and give up the project—in which case I am a ruined and disgraced man."

"That seems satisfactory," Sevrance advanced tentatively, looking to me.

"It will have to be," said Von Holzborn without visible emotion.

I nodded briefly. "Very well," I said. "And you?" I added, questioning the Prussian.

"I? Oh, I shall be safe enough in hiding here. I shall get well at my convenience. This cursed wound is likely to keep me in bed for weeks, but Fritz is a good and faithful nurse; and you will find us here on your return—if I live. You will comprehend that I would not be seen abroad in deference to my health—with consideration also to the activity of the Secret Chapter. As for a return to London, that is out of the question," he added frankly, "until I get money."

"That is all, then," said Sevrance. "We start to-night. Good night."

"Good night and—good luck to you—as far as Libau, gentlemen."

But when we were about to leave the room he called us back.

"One final word," he said weakly. "If you must go to London, keep away from your lodgings and your clubs. Be seen by day as little as possible. That is good advice, my friends. Good night. Oh, by the way, send Fritz. God, I'm afraid I've overdone it——"

Abruptly his voice died, and as we looked the man fainted.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. TRAILL A CONSPIRATOR

Toward evening of a gray and chilly, blustery day —if I remember rightly, it was the fifth following the sealing of our compact with Von Holzborn: the twenty-sixth of January—a fly drew up before the Pig and Whistle tavern, on the Flodden Road, perhaps a mile out of Barmouth, and I was set down, shivering—nay, permeated to the very marrow of my bones with cold and anxiety.

The tavern stood in a desolate spot, removed some considerable distance from the main-traveled road: a house little frequented in the winter months. Low hills crowded about it, and a little stream crossed the highway some distance from the house. From the carriage block no other dwelling could be discovered; this I found much to my satisfaction.

My inspection of the surroundings, however, was not unnecessarily prolonged. A keen wind was blowing inland from the sea, seeking out the tender spots in my carcass without mercy, even through the protecting folds of a heavy overcoat. Overhead arched a sullen sky of a leaden color, and out of it came, at fitful intervals, little flurries of hard and icy snow, with which the frozen earth was liberally powdered.

So I paid the driver of the fly, finding my money

with numbed fingers, surrendered my suit case to an attentive hostler, and skipped indoors without undue delay, bending my head to pass beneath a low door lintel.

Within, to the comfortable contrary, there was warmth and a respectable air of cheerful cleanliness. The taproom proved low-ceiled and gloomy, having but little light from its mullioned windows, with their tiny panes of clouded glass, heavily leaded. But it was scrupulously tidy, and bright with a roaring wood fire that blazed in a huge, old-fashioned chimney corner. You may believe that I backed up to that beaming warmth without any hesitation at all. A barmaid bobbed a welcome from behind her counter and disappeared in search of the landlord, who presently appeared, seemingly more than delighted at the prospect of a paying guest.

"I shall want a room," I told him, feeling as though I had stepped back into the eighteenth century, and rather regretful that I sported no riding cloak with heavy cape, no top boots with spurs, no sugar-loaf hat with a cockade, to fit into the picture.

"You'll be staying, sir?" the landlord piped, rubbing his hands.

"A day or so—perhaps longer," I admitted loftily. "I am expecting a friend. It is possible that he is here now? A Mr. Anthony?"

"Not yet arrived, sir. Tom, bring the gentleman's luggage to the front parlor suite. You are cold, Mr. —now, *what* would the name be?"

"Gordon," said I, giving the pseudonym agreed upon with Sevrance. "There might be a letter wait-

ing? No? Very well; I'll wait here till you warm my rooms."

"Very good, sir; yes, sir. Mary, take Mr. Gordon's order." The landlord bowed himself away.

I ordered a warm drink from the barmaid and stuck to my position by the fireplace. She served me, drew a mug of ale for a solitary guest who sat at another table, and vanished.

Sipping my drink slowly, gradually warming up, furtively I eyed the other guest. At first glance, however, I absolved him of all suspicion of being a Nihilist agent. No Irishman could be accused of that, thought I; and no man ever looked the Irishman bred in the bone more than this.

He was a tall, burly fellow, with the broadest pair of shoulders I have ever seen on human being; thin-flanked, with long and supple legs; his chest rounded out, full and deep as a barrel. For the rest, he had a red-tanned face, set with two smallish blue and twinkling eyes; a head covered with close-cropped hair of a brilliant brick color; and he was royally full. Lolling over his table, he returned my scrutiny, glance for glance, with cheerful impudence.

"'Tis the divvle an' all av a bitther da-ay," he advanced, seeming unprejudiced by what he saw of me.

I was surprised at the clearness of his diction; barring the burr of his brogue, he spoke steadily and distinctly, with intelligence. For all that, he was full as any tick.

"It is cold," I admitted cautiously.

He lurched in his chair and smiled benignly.

"Gordon—did I catch yer name correct, sor?" he pursued, looking me in the eye.

"You did."

"Faith, an' what d'ye think av thot? Shure, now, d'ye know ye look the very spit an' image av a fri'nd av mine?"

"Yes?"

He drank deep, and put down his mug with a clatter. "Th' laast th' daay," he said; "'tis business we'll be thransactin' from now on. Ye do"—with conviction. "His name wud be Grady? Wud ye be knowin' him, sor?"

I pricked up my ears and buried my nose in my glass. This sounded promising. Putting down the glass—"What Grady? There are two or three in the world."

"Thrue for ye," he acquiesced with a chuckle. "But this felly I mane wud be a Grady from Cronstadt!"

"Cronstadt?"

"Where else? D'ye find annythin' strange in thot, now?"—he put it to me with owlish gravity.

"Nothing," I said, smiling in spite of myself. I appeared to search for my watch without success. "Do you happen to know the time?" I inquired.

He produced a huge silver turnip of a timepiece and read the dial with a look of surpassing wisdom.

"'Tis midnight!" he announced.

Footsteps sounded in the hallway beyond the taproom, and the landlord appearing, announcing that my rooms were ready, I arose.

"If you have the time to spare, sir," I said clearly,

"I should like to have a talk with you upstairs, at your convenience. It's a long time since I heard from Grady."

The fellow winked tipsily, and I left him. Not five minutes later his knock resounded on the panels of my door and he entered with a lurch.

"Misther Gordon," he said severely.

"You're drunk," I stated. "How's that?"

"Me natural state, beggin' yer honor's pardon," he replied. "Shure, 'tis only me legs that arre intoxicated, sor. Me hid is thot clear——"

"You're from Sevrance?"

"The same. Me name is Callahan, sor. I'm engaged to be the ingineer. There's no betther in the business, if 'tis meself thot says it. 'Tis a letther I have for yer honor, sor."

He fumbled in the lining of his hat and produced a soiled and crumpled envelope.

It was, indeed, from Sevrance.

"Dear Gordon" (I read): "The bearer, who will be drunk, is one Callahan, a highly efficient engineer. He will tell you, and with truth, that his legs are the only portions of himself that lose their bearings. Drunk or sober, we could get no man better suited to our uses. Grady recommended him.

"I have a brief note from Grady, stating that all is quiet. Fritz signaled once, night of the 23d instant, and was answered. Nothing, however, followed. I think we can go ahead. For my own part, I am getting together a crew of choice and selected scoundrels. Upon my word, I verily believe that we could steal the vessel altogether and lead a life of piratical pleasure on the Spanish Main, with them at our back.

"You will see Greer to-morrow and inform him that the

business is scheduled for midnight of the 28th. Have all things prepared, and don't look for me until the last instant. A.

"P. S.—I will wire Grady, morning of the 27th, to inform V. H. same evening and watch for signals; then to join you at earliest possible moment."

I dropped the note and envelope into the fire, and turned again to Callahan.

"And what are your instructions?"

"I am to kape shober," he recited as by rote, "an' take yer honor's ordhers."

"Well, you had better start right in, then. How long will it take you to sleep this off?"

"Two hours," he announced, after considerable mental computation. "Not wan minute more."

"Very well. Go to the landlord and tell him to give you a room at my expense. Come back when you've slept it out."

"Ver' good, sor."

He saluted with intense solemnity, wheeled abruptly, almost dashed out his brains in attempting to open the door, and left. I heard him take the stairs to the lower floor in two leaps and a crash, and a moment later his voice rose in pacific remonstrance with the landlord, whom he was earnestly assuring that he always came downstairs that way.

I dismissed him from my mind, nor counted upon seeing his face again before morning; to the contrary, he kept his word about waking to a minute; in two hours precisely he was back—quiet, reserved, a little damp as to his hair, but dignified: a capable and intelligent man.

I was up early the following morning, and by ten had driven into Barmouth, going directly, neither courting nor evading observation, to the shipyards of Rogers & Greer, which were situate on the outskirts of the old town, occupying a large plot of land which ran down to the river.

A high board fence shut off the yards from the eyes of the curious, but from the other side came sounds of busy hammers and saws, creaking cranes and clanking steel. The locustlike whirr of the steam-driven rivet hammer was prominent in the uproar. One judged that Messrs. Rogers & Greer did a thriving business.

On the threshold of a dingy office building a clerk took my name and retired to inform Greer. I stated my ostensible errand as a desire to inspect, perhaps to purchase, a small sloop yacht. This gained me prompt attention. Within a very few minutes I was admitted to the inner office.

Greer, a withered little man with shifty eyes and a generally shabby appearance, glanced me up and down without great cordiality. He invited me, however, to a seat by his private desk, and at once launched upon a general description of a certain vessel corresponding to my specifications.

To be frank, his language, a compound of shipbuilding terminology and sea phrases, was so much Greek to my understanding. I listened patiently, interjecting now and again an intelligent " yes," with my eye's corner on Rogers, who confabulated with another client at a desk too near at hand for my comfort.

Eventually, however, his customer rose to go, and Rogers accompanied him to the door. I improved that

instant, which happened to coincide with a momentary cessation in Greer's flow of loquacity, by informing the gentleman that I was from Cronstadt.

He bowed his head between his hands, eying me closely through his fingers. His lips moved, uttering words barely audible.

"Repeat that?" he whispered.

"Cronstadt."

"At what hour did you sail?"

"Midnight—precisely."

The door closed; Rogers turned in to his desk. Greer swung about in his chair and said, in a voice palpably tremulous:

"Er—Mr. Rogers—I am in consultation with a customer from abroad."

The senior partner glanced at me as though my very appearance was a terrifying thing to him, and, without a word, turned and scurried out, snatching his hat from a convenient hook. Greer grinned amiably, somewhat reassured.

"Mr. Rogers is a very nervous man—nervous and conservative," he intimated. "I am obliged to undertake the transaction of all business out of the common run. You will have something to show me?"

I produced Von Holzborn's wallet, and handed him the specified papers. He glanced them over with a keen eye, satisfying himself, evidently, of their authenticity. Then, returning them with a little bow, "When is it to be?" he asked.

"To-morrow, at midnight. You will have everything arranged?"

"Quite. You may rest assured of that."

"The *Clymene* is ready to sail?"

"At a moment's notice. Nothing has been neglected, down to the least detail. Come; I will show you."

He led me out into the shipyards, conducting me along what seemed to me a path hedged about with innumerable dangers in the shape of swinging cranes, flying aërial tramways, falling timber, and madly scurrying men, and through a clamorous din, quite deafening.

Eventually we halted in the lee of an enormous vessel in process of construction on the ways. Here the din was so tremendous that I had some difficulty in catching Greer's words, and was proportionately satisfied that we could not be overheard.

Standing there, on a gentle slope of bare ground, at the edge of which the river flowed, he pointed quietly to a little vessel that swung at anchor some distance out.

"The *Clymene*," he said briefly.

She proved to be a long, narrow-beamed, slate-colored craft, with much of the air of a rather sober private yacht. I remarked that she carried two slender, short spars, with less rigging visible than is ordinary. Two low, gray funnels slanted smartly toward the stern. I thought them somewhat large and heavy looking, for the tonnage. Between them a brace of ventilators showed their red throats. Forward, about a quarter of the yacht's length from the bows, there rose a flimsy and unsubstantial-looking bridge. From there on to the stem the deck seemed to be hooded—bowed—resembling a section of a whaleback boat.

Lifeboats swung from davits on either side. To port, a passenger gangway was rigged out, its lower grating some few inches above the surface of the water.

The boat rode low in the water; which, together with her extreme length, brought to my mind the breath-taking phraseology of the books of my boyhood days: "A long, low, black, rakish-looking craft!" I fancied that I discerned in her an exquisite delicacy of line, betokening considerable speed.

But perhaps you will gain more from Greer's description than from mine.

"Two hundred and twenty feet from stem to stern," he told me, in answer to a query. "Beam, twenty-one six inches. Mean draught, six feet. Displacement, two hundred and ninety tons. Speed——"

"Yes?" I encouraged him, as he paused.

"Something a bit over thirty knots on her trial trip," he said pridefully. "She should do better than that. Sir, I can tell you that her engines are unexcelled. She's driven by twin-screw, vertical, triple-expansion engines of six thousand horse power——"

"Don't!" I pleaded helplessly. "You speak a tongue unknown to me. My curiosity will be satiated if you will give me some idea of how we are to get off to her. Must we swim?"

"To the contrary," he said, "you'll find a number of rowboats moored a little ways upstream."

We began to retrace our steps.

"As to the manner of our taking forcible possession——" I suggested with a smile.

He failed to respond; it was evident that he considered the affair one of desperate moment, and preferred to consider it with all due seriousness.

"You'll bring hammers along and break the locks on the main gates," said he. "The watchmen will be

mostly intoxicated, I imagine. Such as retain their sobriety, sir, you will bind and gag without unnecessary violence. I trust that you will create as little disturbance as possible. Mr. Rogers and myself will be absent from the city for a few days, beginning to-morrow morning, and no one will know just what to do. I fancy that, if no alarm is raised by your raid "—the man never even winked—" no complaint will reach the authorities until the evening of the twenty-ninth."

He halted by a little side gate.

" That," he said, " is all, I believe. I trust sincerely that you will meet with no mishap, that your voyage may be a pleasant and successful one. Good day to you, sir—and if ever I put my hand into such a mess as this again," he exclaimed solemnly, " I pray it may drop off ! "

I left him standing there at the gate, watching me off with serious, troubled, nearsighted eyes: a shabby, little, old, methodical, gray-headed sinner of a shipbuilder, breaking the laws of his country and risking his personal freedom in order to turn a dishonest penny —and quaking to the very soul of him when forced to contemplate the gross enormity of his sin.

CHAPTER XIX

SEIZURE AND PURSUIT

Toward evening of the twenty-eighth, the weather having moderated considerably, a southerly wind sprang up, herding masses of clouds before it. By nightfall the sky was overcast with a slate-hued pall of vapor; and shortly afterwards a drizzle of moisture began to trickle down the window panes of my rooms.

I was the more alive to this since, having worked myself into a veritable fever of impatience and anxiety, I was constantly on the lookout. All through the day I had been expectant of Grady's arrival, with word and instructions from Sevrance; not only had Grady failed me, but nothing—man or message—had come to give me ease of mind.

Therefore, I tramped from wall to window of my bedchamber, as restless as a caged animal, throughout the laggard day.

Callahan and I had supped together sociably enough, but without much conversation. I had taken it upon myself to inform him with such particularity as I deemed advisable of the nature of the expedition.

He had accepted the information without emotion; it was all in the day's work with him. He now sat stolidly smoking at the table, sipping ale and watching me with passive interest.

About ten, with a snort of disgust, I threw myself into a chair opposite him and prepared to solace my disquiet with a smoke. At that moment the rain began to thunder a long roll upon the roof. I started up with an exclamation of dismay.

From the window I could see little: the long stretch of highroad, glimmering a vague, leaden color in the night; the massed blackness of the trees, silhouetted dimly against the white of the unmelted snow, and swaying furiously to the wind, which had freshened into half a gale. But no lights!

I had thought to catch the dancing gleam of carriage lamps approaching from Barmouth; but I strained my eyes futilely against the darkness, discovering nothing.

Below, a door slammed; presently I heard footsteps on the stairs. There came a knock at my door and the landlord entered, upon my permission.

"Man to see you below, sir," he said respectfully. "Shall I let him up, or will you see him in the taproom? He's a rough-looking fellow, sir, and I——"

"Never mind," I said decidedly; "show him up at once."

A minute later the door opened and closed behind a gaunt and ragged figure, soaked to the skin by reason of his long tramp through the rain. He snatched a battered and discolored derby from his head and stood, dripping water and trembling with cold, while he gazed sharply from one of us to the other.

"Well?" I demanded.

"Ye'r' Mr. Gordon, sir?" he inquired, addressing me but keeping a wary eye on Callahan.

"Yes. Be quick."

"Wot about 'im?"—with a jerk of his thumb toward the engineer.

"All right. You're from Mr. Anthony?"

"Yessir. 'Old on, sir; there's summat missin'."

"The countersign? Give it, then."

"Cronstadt."

"And the time of day?"

"Midnight, sir," he said, with an exclamation of relief. Then, shivering: "I'm 'arf froze, guv'ner," he hinted.

"Give me your message, and you shall have all the drink you want."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Anthony sez to meet 'im at the railway station, sir, at 'arf arfter eleven, sir."

"Very well. Callahan, take this man below and pay for a drink for him. And tell the landlord I'll want the fly at once."

"Shure, an' the pleasure do be all me own."

As the door closed behind them, I whipped out my revolver, carefully assuring myself, for what was possibly the twentieth time that day, that it was loaded and in the best of order. It struck me as odd that Sevrance should have sent this fellow, this outcast of the London slums, as he appeared to be, in preference to Grady, who had surely arrived by that hour.

I was, in short, somewhat apprehensive of a final trick on the part of the Secret Chapter, and I was thoroughly determined that I would not be taken, nor meet with Von Holzborn's intended fate, without putting up a stiff fight.

On the other hand, the man came armed with the

countersign and—there was now no time to be wasted. The interval—a scant two hours—between the hour and that set for the attempt upon the shipyard, was all too little as it was.

Accordingly, I took my courage in my hand and went below. Callahan and the recruit—for as such I had to regard the new arrival—were just concluding their potations. I handed my luggage to a hostler and demanded my reckoning.

The fly was waiting; we—Callahan and I—got inside, the messenger clambering upon the box with the driver; and the vehicle set off, with tremendous splashing and maddening deliberation, through a night as black as you please and unpleasant enough to daunt any spirit.

I kept my fingers on the butt of my revolver, saying nothing of my fears, however, to Callahan. Happily they proved groundless. Within an hour and a quarter we drew up at Barmouth railway station and found Sevrance awaiting us.

Having paid and dismissed the driver and given the messenger his instructions—which were to depart and await us, "you know where"—we stepped inside the little waiting room. Acting on Sevrance's suggestion, before I had time to put a single query, I checked my suit case to London and bought me a ticket: a ruse designed to make it appear that I was leaving Barmouth on the midnight train.

Afterwards we returned to the platform, standing in the driving rain to converse—Callahan stalking up and down at a distance, but without losing sight of us: a sort of sentry against interruption.

I eyed Sevrance curiously. He was more than usually subdued in demeanor—decidedly worried, if his expression counted for aught—though he wore his ordinary air of determination and resolution.

"Well?" I asked. "Where's Grady?"

"Heaven knows!" he declared. "You've not seen him?"

"Obviously. Why should I ask, otherwise?"

"I'm not easy about him," Sevrance returned. "I wired him to tell Fritz and Von Holzborn that the attempt was scheduled for to-night, to watch for the signals, and to leave Saltsea on the latest night train, joining me at the Ram's Head in London. He should have done so by ten this morning, at the latest. But, beyond wiring that he would carry out my instructions, I have not heard from nor seen the fellow. It distresses me. I hope that nothing has gone wrong—that infernal Prussian——"

"Probably not. Something easy to explain has taken place. Is it for Grady that you're waiting here?"

"Yes. There is a train due now." He took out his watch and verified his statement by a reference to the hour. "Surely," he insisted, "the man would have sense enough to join us here, if he missed me in London!"

"He will doubtless be on this train," I thought.

But we were to suffer disappointment. The eleven-twenty special from London drew in and out of Barmouth, leaving but few passengers. Grady was not of them.

"I'd give a deal to know what it means," grumbled

Sevrance. "But we'll have to go without the fellow, trusting to luck that all is right. Come along."

In comparative silence—for the wind and the pelting downpour made conversation a matter of extreme difficulty, as you may fancy—we hastened down through the better-class section of Barmouth, and into the rougher districts where the shipbuilders' employees lived.

Presently I made out that we had come directly to the high boarding which inclosed the Rogers & Greer yards. In the shadow of the embrasure of the main gate entrance, we posted ourselves and waited.

I heard a near-by clock boom out the half hour. We had, then, thirty minutes more before the time appointed. Sevrance stepped out into the middle of the thoroughfare and glanced up and down, scanning the neighborhood narrowly.

It lay quiet and deserted enough, to all appearances. The gale and the rain were enough to keep the people from the streets that night; indeed, disagreeable as it was, the conviction forced itself upon me that the very elements were aiding and abetting our project.

Opposite us the lights of a low ginmill gleamed dully through tear-streaked window panes. Farther down the street two more publics stood out in contrast with the less brilliantly illuminated dwellings of the laborers. On the other hand, the same condition of affairs existed. There were, in short, five such places of entertainment within a stone's throw of us.

In a lull in the gale Sevrance put his fingers to his mouth and whistled shrilly, schoolboy fashion, and twice. Immediately I saw a dark figure detach inself from a background of shadow, in the shelter of the nearest

public's doorway, and slouch across the street. The man proved the one who had acted as Sevrance's messenger. "Garvin," Sevrance called him, adding that the fellow was, temporarily, his lieutenant. "A broken-down gentleman," he said, "who has seen a deal of sea life and tries to disguise his birth and breeding with the bearing of a costermonger."

At a word from Sevrance the man turned right-about and sauntered back to the public. I saw his figure silhouetted for an instant against the light that streamed out through the open door, and then he disappeared. In two minutes, however, he came out, turning to the left and slouching up to the next place of entertainment, where he repeated the performance; and so visited in turn all the publics in view.

Shortly after his exit from each the door would again be opened and three or four men would come out, all converging upon a common center—the gate whereat we were waiting.

"They've been here for several days, some of them," Sevrance told me, in an aside. "I only hope that none have fallen out; I tried to give them no more money than would board and lodge them until to-day, but they may have drunk it all up within the first twenty-four hours."

"How many altogether?"

"Thirty-six, including you, Callahan, and myself. I shall get their names as they come up; you count them."

Inasmuch as the first group was at hand, I began to perform that duty immediately. There were four of them; each approached and gave his name in a low tone, waiting until Sevrance had checked him off on

the tablets which he made shift to see by the glow of his cigar.

Already another group was upon us; five this time. The same procedure was resorted to in each case. By degrees, and within the quarter of an hour, Sevrance's list of names had been checked off to the last one—and I was puzzled.

"There!" said my friend, turning to me with an air of relief. "That's not so bad, now, you know. Not a man missing."

"Yes, but——"

"But what?" he demanded impatiently.

"Oh, hang it!" I cried, "I reckon I'm no shakes of a shepherd, Tony. I make the total, including ourselves, thirty-seven."

"You're mistaken, then," he said lightly. "It's no matter, anyhow; we can have a roll call, once we're aboard, and settle it to your satisfaction. I'll go you a guinea that you're off."

"I hope so," I returned; but it made me uneasy. I had made my count with exactness, as I thought, and there should have been no mistake possible. Still, with that number of men standing around us in semi-darkness, I might well have erred.

I put my fears in my pockets with Sevrance's first word of command.

"Garvin," he said, "have you the hammer?"

"Yes, sir."

"You chaps hold yourselves ready, then; and follow me, once the gate's open. Bang away, Garvin!"

Our adventure was, at last, fairly under way! I felt a species of exhilaration at the knowledge. The

spice of danger, the flavor of romance in the undertaking, warmed me like wine, despite the inclemency of the weather. I felt for a time as, I imagine, a knight of old must have felt when entering the lists to do battle for his lady's favor.

You may laugh, if you will, but it was so with me, standing there in the rain-swept darkness of that winter's night, teeth chattering like an end man's bones, heart beating loudly in time to the sharp, swift, and heavy blows of the hammer upon the padlock. I was as eager for the adventure as ever before I had been inclined to regard it with distrust. I felt in my soul that from then on there would be scant opportunity for fears or doubts.

Still, in those days I was younger than now; the illusion of romance gilded all things for me; and I viewed this fool's errand in a light that never will return to me, I dare say.

Garvin managed to create the deuce of an uproar; the lock was proving more difficult than we had anticipated. I heard Sevrance anathematizing the noise, beneath his breath; and ere the gates were forced the entire neighborhood was alive to the fact that something of an extraordinary nature was afoot.

In the beginning, almost with the echo of the first blow, there had come the sound of many feet splashing hurriedly over the sodden ground within the inclosure, together with shouts and demands for information. A voice warned us to desist, and I remember thinking that Greer's watchmen were acting out the rôles he had written them, with rare artfulness.

Hard upon these came an interruption from outside.

I caught a stern and terse command of "'Ere, now! Wot's up?" followed by a command to "Clear out, every man Jack of you!"

There was authority in those tones. I turned, and saw a constable pelting across the street toward us, helmet shining, truncheon brandished over his head.

He came on with a rush, and fell without mercy upon the outer fringe of our men; I saw the truncheon strike out once or twice, and heard the sounds of its impact, followed by hearty and fervent curses from the recipients. And then, abruptly, there was a little gust of laughter shaking the group. A fist, big and heavy, had shot out above the shoulders of the crowd and caught the bobby squarely on the chin. He went down like a log, knocked unconscious—as I afterwards discovered.

Sevrance swung about with a cry of impatience, and just in time to see the *dénouement.*

"Hush that laughing!" he ordered tensely, adding, "Gag that man, tie his hands, and bring him along with us."

A voice responded heartily "Aye, aye, sir!" And I could see that his directions were being carried out.

But I stared at Sevrance in whole-souled admiration. Here was a transformation for your consideration: a steady-going, easy-living, able British barrister, the possessor of an assured income and sworn to uphold the laws of his land, abruptly transfigured into a lawbreaker as bold, as resourceful, and as unscrupulous as any of our associate rapscallions.

He was admirably in earnest at that, and quite absorbed in the execution, the successful consummation

of his project. I saw him throw a hasty glance to the farther side of the street, and, following his example, was aware that the patrons of the public houses had been aroused by the racket.

From the doorway immediately opposite a man emerged, turned, and called to those within. They came piling out with a will, and the group raced over the cobbles toward us.

It was this that Sevrance was observing, and without favor.

"Keep together, men!" he cried, raising his voice. "Kick those fellows out of the way and stick close to me. Come, now, some of you put a shoulder to these gates!"

In response a dozen sprang forward and hurled themselves against the stout oaken barrier. There was a crash, a chorus of shouts from within, and the mob of us surged through the opening, Sevrance and Callahan leading.

Truly, Greer's hope that the affair would seem the work of a rowdy band of thieves was being realized to the last degree. I caught myself thinking that never a more disorderly rabble had assembled in the streets of Barmouth than this which I was heading with Sevrance, my friend!

The next instant, however, that happened which gave a new color to my thoughts. I heard a snapping report ahead of us, saw a flash of flame athwart the darkness, and felt the cold breath of a bullet that winged, hissing, past my cheek.

"Good Lord!" I gasped, aghast, in Sevrance's ear; "Greer has played us false!"

I got no reply, and deserved none; for the truth of that observation was momentarily becoming self-evident. We encountered, in the course of the next few moments, a sturdy and unyielding resistance from the yard watchmen.

To this day I believe that Greer's heart had failed him at the last moment; that he had concluded to let the affair take its course without further aid from him. Certainly, his instructions for submission, if actually issued to the watchmen, went totally disregarded. The men stood their ground nobly, according to their conception of their duty, and gave us battle without the least hesitation.

But the fellows behind us were not of the sort to be deterred by such an obstacle, and, moreover, they outnumbered the watchmen six to one. They rushed upon them, growling with rage, evidently without a thought of retreating before that show of force.

Fortunately, for the time being, they themselves were without arms; else, I fear, more than one of those worthy and loyal watchmen had been shot down that night. As it was, they put up a resistance stiff enough to cause a considerable delay, and were only overcome by force of numbers and at the cost of three of our men, who were slightly wounded in the welcoming fusillade.

That obstacle disposed of, however, a clear path lay before us. As much could not now be said of the rear, for the loafers of the district were assembling and pouring into the yard in momentarily increasing numbers. By good chance the firing served to dismay them somewhat; they shrank from exposing themselves to a danger

which did not, in the first place, concern them, and for a time loitered about the broken gate, either undecided as to what had best be done, or else waiting for a reenforcement of the constabulary.

That came in time, too, and at a moment too early to be entirely agreeable to us of the attacking and invading party. We had no more than disposed of the watchmen before I recognized the police whistles in the distance.

As the one who knew the lay of the land, my capacity was that of guide. I led by dead reckoning, most of the time entirely at a loss as to our whereabouts, but blundering on somehow in an approximately accurate course for the river's edge. In this I may have been aided, in a slight degree, by a fairly good and instinctive bump of location. At any rate, I made a pretty fair cast for the spot whence Greer and I had surveyed the *Clymene* —found, without a delay positively damning, the ship in whose lee we had stood the previous morning. From there the outlines of the *Clymene*, which might be mistaken for no other craft by reason of her peculiar build, were vaguely discernible, and we were further assisted in locating her by the riding lights.

But, as to the boats?

Too late I realized that I had forgotten to make Greer point out the exact spot whence we were to embark. I'll confess that I began to entertain a pretty poor opinion of my own executive abilities, and, indeed, I had not the spirit nor the face to resent Sevrance's scathing criticism when I hastily explained to him the true state of affairs. It seemed, for the moment, as though we had cast the fat into the fire without taking

ordinary, common-sense precautions against burning our fingers; we had come thus far only to be balked by my stupidity.

Fortunately, I remembered that Greer had vaguely indicated the position of the boats as "some distance upstream." I quoted this to Sevrance. Callahan, who had joined our hasty council of war, overheard, and slipped off into the darkness.

From the outer, landward section of the shipyard now came a terrific clamor. We gathered from the din that a considerable force of constabulary had arrived upon the scene, and that an intelligently organized hue and cry was being raised.

Our men clustered about us, grumbling. I found time to note that some few had been drinking rather heavily; but I was somewhat reassured by the fact that the majority seemed clear of head, sober and ready; their *morale* was like to steady the befuddled ones.

Sevrance turned to them, briefly outlining the situation. I was grateful to him for sparing me; he said that we had missed the boats, through no fault of anyone concerned. Slight patience would be required, then all would doubtless be well. In the meantime he gave directions for the sequestering temporarily of the unconscious constable in a near-by tool shed. "And if any others come to bother us," he ordered, "give them a dose of the same, boys."

At the moment of his peroration Callahan reappeared. "'Tis meself," he announced, "that has found 'em, sor. If ye'll be good enough t' sthep this way, gintlemin——"

We were good enough to follow him, you may be

sure. We slipped out of the illumination furnished by the near-by electric arc, and shambled on through mud ankle deep, in total darkness—a compact body of men, and silent. I lost reckoning there, even as I lost touch with Sevrance. Our crowd was close about me, and I surrendered myself to their guidance, content to follow the general direction. After several minutes, enlivened by a momentarily increasing racket of pursuit, we came to the water's edge. There we came upon a number of small boats, some apparently seaworthy, many worthless, according to the statements of those around us.

Without more ado, however, and as circumspectly as possible, we got into them—six to ten to a boat. Callahan's voice was to be heard, indicating an adjacent boathouse as the spot where oars were obtainable. Several dozen were apparently brought out and thrown upon the ground for selection, with a clatter that brought the pursuers down upon us in short order. Finally, however, something like order was resolved out of that chaos. I heard Sevrance calling to me, evidently from a boat at some distance upstream, and I answered, reassuring him as to my safety.

A mob of men charged across a lighted space some distance inland, with a chorus of yells, apprising us that we were discovered. Callahan, in the boat next mine, raised a shout to push off. There were some seconds of furious splashings, varied with profanity and the bumping and scraping of boats; the darkness held about us intense and unrelieved.

Abruptly I was aware that the boat in whose stern I sat was afloat. I fancy it was the last to get off.

Hardly had the men found the oars, and the blades caught the water, ere the foremost of the landsmen were wading out after us. There was scuffling about the bows; it was too dark for me to ascertain precisely what was going on, but I surmised that some more audacious ones had seized the oars and the side of the boat.

It swayed and rocked perilously, to my mind, who sat, expecting every moment to find myself floundering in the shallows. The fighting seemed to increase rather than to lessen; it began to appear as though we alone were to suffer detention—perhaps a permanent one. I could see the other boats slipping by, black blurs against the more dense blackness of the river's surface, their occupants encouraging us with shouts and advice—mostly unintelligible.

From ashore there came a pistol shot. Its flash seemed to enlighten the whole situation. I drew my own weapon, stood up between the thwarts, and opened fire aimlessly, trusting to the moral effect.

It proved a success most complete and gratifying. Without pause, I pulled the trigger until the six chambers of the cylinder were empty. Some one shrieked, "My Gord, I'm murdered!" and there was a furious splashing as his fellows sprang back, fighting with one another to be the first to escape from harm's way. In an instant our oars were released.

Somebody stuck an oar into the mud of the river's bed and shoved off briskly. Others poised their oars, awaiting a general signal to give way. The boat swung off into deeper waters as we scrambled for our seats. Presently it ceased rocking; we were all in place. I

took upon myself the duties of coxswain—little as I knew them, and raising my voice in an interval of quiet, shouted: "Give way!"

There was more confusion before the men finally got the stroke; then they pulled with a vengeance. We shot out into the murky obscurity of the river's farther reaches; I groped for the tiller ropes, found them, and, after two or three miserable blunders, got some of the hang of the business and managed to steer a tolerably straight course in the wake of the other boats.

Gradually the din and clamor ashore stilled. I gathered that the constables were manning a boat to set off after us, but before they had actually settled down to the work of rowing, I fancy, we were floating at the gangway of the *Clymene*—the last of our boats, even as I myself was the last man to board the yacht.

As I did so, the fellow who had been holding the boat in position with a hook, let it slide. It slipped off into the darkness and he sprang on up the ladder. I followed more leisurely, though intensely excited.

Sevrance greeted me with a silent, reassuring handclasp at the top of the gangway, and immediately that I had set foot on deck, a number of men sprang to unship the ladder. I stood aside—Sevrance having gone about his duties—and watched them working away in complete darkness, but with intelligence and spirit.

It seemed remarkable to me—the genius for organization which my friend had displayed in putting through this affair. Every man seemed to know his place and business. In later talks with Sevrance, I have learned of the infinite care with which he chose his crew, and how painstakingly the details were plotted out, to

each man being assigned his place and duties which he was to begin to fill and perform the moment he got aboard.

But at the time, as I say, it seemed quite marvelous to me—to stand there, idle as I had to be for the time, and watch those mute, shadowy forms springing about the decks and preparing all for our long and perilous voyage—as we had to imagine it in prospect, to whom the gift of second sight was denied.

On one point I was at ease, so soon as I recovered enough from the excitement of the affair to realize it. The *Clymene* was athrill from stem to stern with a deep, heavy vibration—not unlike the purring of a tiger cat many times magnified. It told me that, for one thing, Greer had at least kept his word about having steam up and all prepared against our coming; for another, that we would presently slip anchor and glide gently down the estuary and over the bar, beyond which lay the open North Sea.

I dodged back to the stern sheets, and there leaned upon the rail, watching for indications of the pursuing boats. A far, dim clamor apprised me that the chase had not been abandoned and a few distant, glimmering lights, dancing over the face of the river, I thought to be lanterns in the prows of rowboats. Also, from the flicker of lights ashore, I gathered that the town was waking up and growing more and more excited.

It was several hours after we had cleared the bar and had reached the waters of the high sea, that the late winter morning dawned dim and gray. Sevrance and I, standing upon the deck, were congratulating ourselves upon what now seemed our safety from pursuit.

For, far out on our port side, Sevrance pointed to a dark bulk that, as we looked, took shape out of the formlessness of the sea. Something in the well-known gracefulness of the outlines made us aware that it was the *Myosotis*. But even as I looked, Sevrance seized my arm and whirled me sharply around.

At some distance to the south, apparently following in our immediate wake, loomed another shape—the shape of a vessel considerably our superior in size and weight, flying the British flag.

I seized the binoculars and rattled off the flags as quickly as I might. Sevrance rustled the leaves as briskly; hardly had I ended, than the code-book crashed upon the deck as Sevrance snatched the glasses from me without ceremony, and, turning, directed them to the southward.

"What the deuce——?" I gasped.

"We're pursued!" he cried. "Now I know—! By heavens, Gordon, we're in for it!"

He returned the glasses just as Callahan came tumbling up a hatchway, dragging after him a man by the collar.

"This damned furriner, George Pike, sor!" he cried breathlessly. "Been aplayin' the divvil's own tricks with my engines!"

"Get back to your engines!" Sevrance roared. "Full speed ahead! What's that about Pike? Let him go—throw him overboard—but get——"

My eyes were glued to the glasses. For an instant I gazed at random, seeing naught to justify his excitement; but a moment later a heavy yet acute report rolled over the waters, and following the apparent direction

of the sound, I brought the binoculars to bear upon—what I then chose to consider—the enemy.

A whorl of vapor, snow white against the black smoke from her funnels, showed that the gun had been fired from the war vessel. From her single mast, below the ensign of her nationality, flapped a line of flags and pennants.

She was coming on at top speed, ramming a heavy, clumsy-looking nose into the sullen, swelling seas, as if in determined and relentless endeavor to overhaul us.

Something in the ugly shape of her seemed to strike cold terror into my heart. I saw ourselves doomed to capture and imprisonment—long durance in the English prisons as penalty for our violation of the laws of neutrality. A suspicion that Greer had played informer flashed through my mind, and I cursed him and his kin, root and branch, back to the primordial ancestors of his breed.

But Sevrance was all alive, nor in the least content to throw up the sponge. In a twinkling he had the code-book in hand again—and Garvin had possessed himself of the glasses, without a word of apology for his unceremonious manner of taking them from my hands. He read the signals clearly, more swiftly than I could have—which was his sufficient excuse—while Sevrance translated, a grim and determined smile about his thin lips.

"Stand by!" I heard him say at length.

And then again the forward gun of the pursuing vessel spoke, smothering his voice. Ere the echo died he had cast the book aside and was smiling blithely into my eyes.

"'Stand by or we will sink you,' Gordon," said he. "Shall we?"

Instinctively I looked toward the *Myosotis*. "Shall we desert *her*?" I would have asked, bethinking me of the yacht's precious burden. But the yacht was now surging ahead swiftly and swinging off at an acute angle from our course.

"Oh, she can take care of herself; *they're* in no danger. It is we who are wanted—wanted bad—a price upon our heads! Let them shift for themselves; *we'll* make a run for our own liberty!" He paused, his face darkening as he cast a glance down the length of the *Clymene's* deck. "Hang it all!" he cried regretfully.

"What now?"

He flourished a hand with a gesture of helpless choler. "If things were only otherwise! If that were any but an English vessel, I'd give her all the fight she wants!"

"You'd——"

"Fight, if she were—say—German? With all my heart, man! It drives me frantic to see those guns and realize that we cannot use them—for we can't turn them against a ship of our own country!"

"Guns?" I repeated.

"There!" he indicated, and "there, there, and there!" jerking his fingers fretfully toward four quarters of the deck, where some objects—which I had theretofore placidly and stupidly considered parts of the machinery—stood hooded in shining waterproof.

"Two twelve-pounder and two six-pounder rapid-fire guns," Sevrance explained with forced calm. "The largest guns—those fore and aft—are the twelve-

pounders. Great heavens, man! haven't you troubled yourself to wonder what *those* might be?"

He indicated two heavy, shapeless excrescences, moundlike lumps of oilcloth, of a size superior to the guns. One was placed, as exactly as I could determine, amidships; the other toward the stern.

"Whitehead torpedo tubes—long eighteen inch," he stated briefly. "Now, that boat astern there—!" He took up the glasses and subjected our pursuer to a searching scrutiny. "Torpedo-boat destroyer," he said, his face clouding. "If I mistake not, the *Asp*, of the Channel Squadron. She could blow us out of the water, if—but, of course, we can't resist."

"You think it possible to resist a destroyer?"

"Possible, Gordon! My word!" And he waggled a sagacious forefinger under my nose. "Possible! If that were only French or German, I'd take the chance in a moment! In a case like this, who strikes first wins. Now, if I could launch a well-aimed Whitehead before the *Asp* gets down to work, you'd see some fancy pyrotechnics, I promise you! However—we must run. But there's one thing: we'll do it under our true colors—the Russian colors, Gordon!"

He called to Garvin and ordered the Russian colors hoisted to the masthead.

Meanwhile, Callahan had disappeared; evidence of his presence in the engine room was presently manifested in the increasing speed of the *Clymene*. Even in the brief period of our talk the pace had waxed fast and furious. Now we were fairly shooting through the waters, the sharp stem of our boat cutting the waves like the blade of a knife. From out the funnels, twin

columns of heavy smoke poured, to be cut off as though pressed down by an invisible shield just above their black mouths, and spread out fanwise, trailing behind us, an ebony pall lengthening into the south.

For the moment the mists had closed between us and the *Asp*. As my thoughts went back to her, she gave token of her continued pursuit and unremitting vigilance by a single sullen and portentous boom, that rolled over the seas like the deep-throated belling of a bloodhound—with an effect upon us, its hearers, scarcely less awe-inspiring.

I shuddered, and, turning to the rail, looked for the *Myosotis*. At first glance I fancied we had lost her; but a second thorough inspection of the waters—maybe because the fog was thinning between us all the time—showed me her dim and ghostlike form flitting northward, still in company with us, yet, I fancied, constantly diverging toward the west.

So they were deserting us! That conviction forced itself upon me; I smiled bitterly, thinking such a course no more than characteristic of the ship's officers, who, I made no manner of doubt, were all suborned in the service of the Herr Captain Kurd von Holzborn—whose memory I cursed.

But as for my Heart's Desire, very well I knew that she had no hand in this cowardly abandonment. That she realized it at all I doubted; but if she did, I was convinced that it was against not only her will but her expressed command that the *Myosotis* was seeking its own safety.

The shadowy vision of the yacht vanished and was lost. Eight bells sounded, and with it came the change

of watch. The new force of men tumbled up to the deck in a lively fashion, eyes dancing with excitement in one or two instances, at least. They clustered about in small groups, scanning the veiled reaches of the sea and talking together in low tones, out of which, now and again, would rise a single voice, declaiming.

I passed one such gathering and heard a member narrating some incident which had occurred when he was gunner aboard the ——(he named a vessel of the English navy), and he appealed to a mate, standing near by, for verification of his yarn. Another chimed in with a comment based upon his experiences as A. B. on another war vessel—this of the United States navy.

It was a slight circumstance, but it drove home to me the truth of that which I heard Garvin urging upon Sevrance a bit later.

We were driving northward at top speed then, the vibrations of her heavy engines making the frail hull of the *Clymene* to thrill from stem to stern, as a slight and slender body shaken with the mighty pulsations of a heart disproportionately huge.

Both the *Asp* and our consort had disappeared entirely. There was naught on deck to claim my attention; an insistent restlessness possessed me wholly. I found myself unable to keep still, obsessed with the notion that something ought to be done—that I was delinquent in my duty, who stood there on the bridge, idly, hands in pockets, a puppet amongst men.

At last I wandered away in search of Sevrance, whom I found in the wardroom, in close confabulation with Garvin—or, rather, I should say, in earnest argument.

Garvin, as I came down the companion way, seemed to be urging upon him some course to which Sevrance as strenuously was objecting.

So absorbed were they, that I was accorded but a passing glance, as one of inconsiderable authority. Slightly piqued, I turned to leave them to their own devices, when my attention was caught and held by Garvin's words.

"But, Mr. Sevrance, sir," he was urging, "it is the most sensible thing to do, sir. Let me tell you that the *Asp* will not dare join issue with us if we show her that we are not content to throw up our hands at the word of command. You forget, sir, that we fly the Russian flag. D'ye think that the commander of the *Asp* will not ponder it a long time ere he declares war on a friendly nation? So long as we acknowledge ourselves British subjects by standing by and meekly permitting them to board us—well, in that case the authorities will have gained their end; they'll have frightened us into submission. But if we only pretend to resist—make a show of resisting——"

"We're doing that now," Sevrance countered doggedly.

"By running away? Granted. But, allowing that a stern chase is a long chase, do you believe that we will distance the *Asp*, the fastest vessel in these waters?"

"Most certainly. More—I know it. When we get into our stride, Callahan says——"

"Ah, he *says*! But does he *know*, sir? There's the question. You're trusting to luck—and chancing prison not only for yourself and Mr. Traill here, but for the pack of us. Don't you think you should show us some

consideration, sir—give us a—well, say a fighting chance? "

Sevrance, his face overcast, grumbled a dissent.

" We're all tried men—I mean the most of us are, Mr. Sevrance, sir," Garvin pursued. " We've served in 'most every navy the world over. I could muster half a dozen gun crews without any trouble—and not only that, but the magazines are full, sir, and the torpedoes themselves lack nothing but their war heads——"

" No," decided Sevrance solidly.

There was determination in his tone, yet I sided with Garvin.

" You're unfair, Tony," I broke in. " And Garvin's right. Give our fellows a chance——"

" Thank you, Mr. Traill, sir," said Garvin earnestly.

" Look here, man. It can do no harm to have the guns loaded against emergencies, can it? We'll agree that if worst comes to worst we'll surrender to the *Asp* without firing a shot. But——"

" Well, but what? What maggot's in your brain now, Gordon? "

" Consider it calmly, dispassionately. Here we have caught aboard a man whom it's no stretch of the imagination to consider an agent of the Revolutionary party. Do you believe for a minute, Tony, that he *chanced* upon us? Don't you suppose that the Secret Chapter knew all about us, and sent him along only to do what he could to disable the ship? Is it likely that they would neglect to inform the authorities? Indeed, we've proof that they've done just that—the *Asp* back there—and perhaps they've put the Japs wise. Those little chaps "—I pressed my point home as I saw Sev-

rance weakening—" are capable of stealing a boat on their own account, if they fancied that, by so doing, they could prevent the *Clymene* reaching Libau."

" Oh, very well!" He surrendered with a flirt of his hand. " Have it your own way, but—" Garvin had started for the companion way; Sevrance recalled him with a word: " Garvin!"

" Sir? "

" You understand, you are to tell the men that the first who fires a shot against the *Asp*, or any other British vessel that mixes in this squabble, will be shot by me instantly. Tell 'em not to forget it," he added grimly, producing and examining a brace of heavy revolvers.

Garvin saluted. I fancied a twinkle of amusement lightened his eyes. But he said " Yes, sir " very gravely, and left the cabin without another word.

It became evident that Garvin was an uncommonly efficient man, with a clear understanding of what he wished accomplished and the proper way to go about getting it done to his satisfaction. Hardly had he disappeared when there arose a clamor of shouts with a stampede of hurrying footsteps overhead; also, something very like a cheer. I smiled openly.

Sevrance caught my look and shook his head in disapprobation. For the moment he sat moodily silent, his slender brows knitted.

Something in the dejection of his attitude, in the cast of care that overspread his fine and almost austerely ascetic features, moved me with an impulse of warm friendliness. I crossed the wardroom floor and put a diffident hand upon his shoulder.

He looked up with his gentle, slow smile, that in-

stantly gave way to a troubled expression, and again shook his head from side to side despondently.

"A bad business, Tony," he sighed; "a bad business. Would to God that we were out of it—Julia and you and I!"

"Amen!" said I.

CHAPTER XX

THE DUEL

After a while I went on deck again, still under the restlessness that ran like fire in my veins. . . . Ah, well, but I was new to this sort of thing, a timid stranger in the wilder walks of life.

The *Clymene* was plunging on like a thoroughbred racer, through a dark cloud that hid all else from us. Whether the *Myosotis* or the *Asp* were far or near, it was impossible to say. In the bows the lookout was staring anxiously into the fog-bound distances; another was on duty in the masthead, hidden from my sight by the lowering clouds. Because of the necessity for escaping our enemy, the fog signals were neglected; to use them would be to provide the *Asp* with a trail of sound. But no other possible precaution was slighted; at any moment a vessel—a fishing smack or more important craft—might loom out of the obscurity dead ahead; and there was about the entire yacht an air and attitude of strained and tense-strung expectancy.

Garvin had mustered all hands, I found; the deck was alive with hurrying shapes; there were calls and the rattle of steel, and dull, heavy thumpings on the planks.

I peered over the side for a short while, but saw nothing beyond a brief stretch of slate-colored foam near the *Clymene's* water line; then straggled off and groped my way to the after twelve-pounder.

It had been relieved of its protecting hood and stood a grim, glistening tube of blue steel, its polished surface bedewed with drops of moisture. About it lounged what might serve for a gun crew of men, and near at hand were cases of ammunition which Garvin had caused to be brought up from the magazine.

The men were loading the weapon, and laughing and joking. I watched with a sort of fascination, a little awed by these warlike preparations. As for the men, they seemed to take it for granted that we were to fight for our liberty, if it came to a pinch; nor did they impress me as at all averse to the prospect of open war. I dare say they were old hands at such scenes; for they took it in a way that compelled admiration. Only one or two—and these the younger men, plainly unseasoned—I found casting furtive glances over the rail, with pallid faces and strained lips, as though momentarily expectant of the apparition of the *Asp* or the scream of a shell.

These won my sympathy. I myself was not happy.

Amidships, Garvin was instructing a cluster of men about the torpedo tube. He, too, seemed to take it for a certainty that there would be fighting; for he was very particular, and left nothing essential unexplained—or so it seemed to me.

Shortly after, he went aft to the other tube and started to instruct its crew also. I lingered a moment, then turned nervously away. As I did so, there came a hail from the lookout—a frenzied screech:

"Ship ahoy! Dead ahead! Port—port f'r yer life!"

I grasped at the intelligence that another vessel was

lying across our bows, and found myself stumbling forward headlong upon the slippery deck, my heart in my mouth.

A frantic chorus of shrieks, cries, oaths ascended from our decks. The men ran hither and thither, for the moment, aimlessly—I thought. I blundered into one or two and caromed off before reaching my objective point—the bows. A hasty glance backward toward the wheel showed me a scene of utter confusion, made chaotic to the eye by the swirling reefs of fog that hung, faintly luminous, over us, magnifying all things.

But ahead—and so near that my heart seemed to stop entirely for the instant—there loomed the shape of a vessel, so placed, I thought, that we were surely doomed to ram her amidships: as big as a mountain, to my excited vision—bulking huge and unevadable above us, riding the waves heavily, as with conscious weight and power.

As in a dream, I saw her long, slaty sides draw near us—so near that I fancied I could have touched her with an oar. I saw her open portholes, the cluster of white faces with protruding eyes that fringed the rail, the open mouths of cannon sliding past, grim and menacing. I even heard the roar of commands and imprecations that seemed, in a way, to hover over her—and dimly, subconsciously, I recognized the words and oaths as German, even as I got a fugitive impression that the faces that for an instant glared into mine, then were lost, were of a Teutonic cast.

For a full minute, that lingered like an age, collision appeared inevitable. I believe that I stopped breathing; I know that I clutched the rail so fiercely

that my hands ached with the strain of it afterwards. Behind me there arose the roaring of a maddened mob, and I recall thinking that out of such confusion no reason, no salvation could come to us.

Yet there were cool heads upon our decks and in our engine room. Garvin, I believe, is entitled to the greatest credit for averting the horror. The rights of it I never could ascertain, however—the fact remains that something happened; the engines slowed—backed perhaps; we swung off gradually, our bows all but scraping the stranger's quarter; the space slowly at first, then more swiftly, widened between us; the vessel seemed to vanish like an apparition, a figment of our overstrung imaginations—gliding swiftly back into the mist whence it had sprung, an unsubstantial shape of fear, as swiftly to be infolded in its damp embrace—blotted out entirely.

But as it passed, the stern of the ship was for an instant large before my eyes. I saw, and consciously at the time registered her name, sprawled large—*Vistula*.

You may laugh if you will, but I'll swear that the name, somehow, struck a cold chill into my very vitals. I don't know why this was so; but I distinctly recall clinging to the rail and shuddering, my gaze fixed as if fascinated on the spot where the word had appeared.

And then a strange and terrible thing happened—strange and terrible, at least to us, to whom it came utterly without warning.

The ship had vanished completely; I myself was just recovering from the shock; our decks were quieting, order was being restored. I believe I had heard the

jangle of bells in the engine room—though that may be my error. I know that we were again settling into our stride, forging ahead at ever-increasing speed.

Suddenly the fog was split as if by a sword of flame: a column of ruddy orange fire stabbed out from it—from the place where the *Vistula* had been. A deafening roar filled my ears, like a clap of heavy thunder. And the bolt fell upon our decks.

A ventilator seemed to rise bodily into the air, as though snatched from its supports by some invisible, giant hand; it hung suspended, quivering, before my astonished vision, then abruptly seemed to fall apart, splintered into atoms of metal.

Simultaneously I saw a deep furrow appear, as though turned up by a giant plow, across the deck. A considerable portion of the port rail disappeared as if by magic, with a tremendous tearing and ripping sound.

There followed an instant's silence on the part of the crew—a silence of profound amazement, wherein our minds strove vainly to grapple with the sickening truth. In it, a rain of splinters and bits of iron began to fall upon the decks; and it was ended by a sudden and terrible shriek of mortal agony.

Dumfounded, I started forward a pace or two, then stopped as if myself shot, staring with horror at the sight that lay beneath my eyes—of a Thing, that had been Man, a mass of disjointed and sundered parts, fouling the decks for yards about with the hue of blood.

I stood as though rooted to the spot, quivering with disgust and sickness, unable to do aught but stare on and on at the Thing that seemed to charm me with a numbing terror. Beyond, there lay another, less aw-

fully mutilated, still living and filling the air with heart-rending moans. I could not look that way—I merely knew that it was there.

With an effort I wrenched myself away, staggering back to the rail, there to lean over and look down into the slimy, oily, crawling sea, my nerves terribly ajangle.

Dully, I heard yet another report. Somehow it seemed more distant, and the shot appeared to expend itself harmlessly. At any rate, if it struck us, I had not strength to turn to see what damage it might have created. . . . I was very ill.

After a long time I came to my senses again, and weakly enough reeled aft to the wardroom, having eyes for nothing that was taking place, for none that fell in my way as I progressed. I found liquor, renewed my strength, and presently began to think more coherently; to understand that we had been fired upon by a stranger ship, without—so far as we could tell—reason or excuse.

I went again on deck, joining company with Sevrance and Garvin, who were standing near the after rail, looking back over the waters. I glanced about before speaking.

The *Clymene* was ramming on at racing speed, as though naught had occurred. A hasty glance forward, showed me that the Horror had been removed, the deck roughly sluiced with sea water.

The fog was lifting. Ahead lay an endless waste, the color of blued steel, darkening with the gathering shades of evening. The early winter night was shrouding the horizon with sable curtains, but within the amphitheater of the seas a little light still held tenaciously.

Far to port I saw again the white, ghostly shape of the *Myosotis*, and, as I looked, her lights were shown. But it was not with her that I was now concerned; my interest lay not in the safety of my Heart's Desire—of that I was assured, the distance between us was so great; it was with our own lives; and my gaze went astern, seeking the *Asp* and that ship, named the *Vistula*, which had used us so evilly.

They were following—that I saw at once. The *Asp*, as nearly as one could say, came plunging on dead astern, and seemed to have lost in the race. I judged her two miles distant. The *Vistula* was far nearer. Less than a mile lay between her prows and our stern post. As I looked, a tongue of flame leaped out from her bows, and something sped, singing, to port.

"A twelve-pounder," Sevrance declared judicially.

I dare surmise that I turned a blanched and frightened countenance upon him; I remember clutching his arm.

"Tony!" I cried. "In God's name, man, what does it mean?"

"It means that we're up against it, Gordon—to adopt one of your pet Americanisms," he returned with an unconvincing attempt at lightness. His own features were gray with apprehension, his lips drawn thin and tense.

"It means," he translated more seriously, "that we are hounded by both Britain and Japan—there!"

I turned in time to catch a flash of light from the *Asp's* bows. Some time afterwards the report came to our ears.

"It means," said Sevrance, "that we have the choice of hauling to and surrendering, or being riddled by those destroyers, my boy. God knows how that Jap got into these waters, but there she is!"

"Jap!" I echoed. "What under heaven, Tony——"

"That boat that fired upon us—that's what I mean," he retorted irritably. "She's Japanese."

"She's not——"

"Take the glasses and look at her flag, then," he cried impatiently. "What do you know about it, anyhow?"

"Why—but, Tony, is '*Vistula*' a Japanese word —name?"

"What's that got to do with it, man? '*Vistula*'? No; that's German, of course——"

"But that ship is the *Vistula*, Tony! I saw it lettered on her stern——"

"*Vistula*!" interrupted Garvin. "But the flag——"

Sevrance seized me by the shoulders. "Gordon," he cried, shaking me roughly, "what are you saying, man? Do you understand? Are you sane? That ship——!"

"I am perfectly sane—quite competent," I expostulated. "I saw the name as she sheered off, when we were near running her down. I was standing up there, in the bows——"

"By God!"

Sevrance stared blankly into my eyes. "German!" he repeated, wetting his lips. "The *Vistula*!" He shook his head. "The Japanese flag is, then, merely a blind——"

Garvin struck in, throwing his remark to us over

his shoulder, as he stood facing astern, his eyes on the *Vistula.*

"Mr. Traill's right, sir," he said. "That's the boat. I thought I'd seen those lines somewhere before, gentlemen. I remember her now—saw her launched at Wilhelmshaven. She's the biggest and most powerful destroyer afloat, and the fastest! We've got about as much chance of getting away from her as a mouse has with a cat!"

Sevrance looked at me, shaking his head thoughtfully. "The devil to pay, Gordon!" he said. "The devil to pay!" A sudden flash of comprehension illuminated his eyes. "Do you think—Gordon—do you think——?"

I nodded, knowing that he had Von Holzborn in mind: "He's quite capable."

The *Vistula* fired again, and the projectile clipped very close to us. I remember vaguely hearing a chorus of excited comment from the men.

"The ingenuity of the archfiend himself!" said Sevrance slowly. "Capable? Ah, yes! Poor Grady!" he added, after a moment. "Poor Grady!"

"Trust Grady for taking care of himself," said I. "That isn't the point, Tony. We've our own skins to think of. What——"

"Aye," he agreed mournfully; "what are we to do?"

I caught Garvin's eye, heavy with meaning; I looked down the deck and saw the men standing at quarters—a warlike sight, in a way, as they waited attentive and ready by the guns and tubes, and one that sent the hot blood hammering into my temples. I nodded agreement to Garvin.

"Tony, you remember what you said a bit back—while we were down there in the cabin?"

Sevrance shook his head. "What?" he asked indifferently.

"That you'd not hesitate a minute if you had a German boat to deal with, instead of a British—when we were considering resisting the *Asp*, you know?"

He seemed to jump suddenly from indecision to decision. "You're right!" he cried eagerly. "We'll leave the *Asp* out of the question for the time being. It is a German boat, now, and, by the Eternal, Gordon, we'll give her a skin full of fight if she persists!"

I could almost have fancied our words overheard by the Germans, or that their glasses had shown them Sevrance's clenched fist as he turned and brandished defiance of the *Vistula*.

"If it's war you want," he cried, "you'll have your fill of it, my friends!"

And on the instant, twin spurts of flame leaped from the *Vistula's* bow guns. One of our boats swung far out on the davits and collapsed like a crushed eggshell. The rain of splinters, fortunately, proved harmless.

Garvin sprang to the after torpedo-tube, whose crew stepped aside respectfully to give him way. With eager hands he clutched the firing mechanism—then turned, with shining eyes and excitement visible in the quivering of his limbs.

"D'ye mean that, Mr. Sevrance, sir?" he cried. "Shall we reply?"

"Reply? Instantly!" roared Sevrance, exalted with rage.

For a moment I thought that Garvin was going to

pull trigger—if a torpedo tube had a trigger; which I cannot say. But he hesitated, calming himself with visible effort. Abruptly, without a word of explanation, he darted down to the wardroom, returning—taking the companion way at breakneck speed—with a curious-looking apparatus in his hand, with which he approached the rail.

"What the deuce's that?" I asked.

"Torpedo director," he returned in a breath. "Gets the right range. In a case like this," he panted on, placing the machine on the deck and beginning to adjust it, "I'm taking no chances, sir. We'll blow those curs out o' the water or—go under in the attempt!"

"Amen!" prayed I.

A little cheer went up from the crew. So small was our deck space that practically every man aboard was within ear range of Sevrance, Garvin, and myself, and could hear all that was said. Their spirit was only the more thoroughly evidenced by the ring of that cheer—they were with us to a man.

I think that the *Vistula's* officers must have been watching us closely through their glasses, and have understood our intentions toward them. As Garvin knelt, adjusting the torpedo director, they opened upon us with their rapid-fire guns—happily with execrable aim. At first their shots flew wide—and our men yelped cheerful derision, forgetful of their slain shipmates and the wrecked lifeboat.

Garvin himself remained unmoved. Imperturbably he adjusted the director, now and again bending to sight along it. Presently I saw him straighten up and raise one hand.

There was a slight, muffled explosion, much like a heavy, bronchial cough, with scarcely any perceptible jar. Simultaneously the torpedo slipped smoothly from the tube, seemed to pause hesitant in the air for a second, then vanished gracefully, taking a long, curving dive over the rail, entering the water with scarcely a splash, and disappearing completely.

I fancied that, a moment later, I caught a glimpse of its slim, steel body lifting upward toward the surface, far in our rear and directly in a line with the *Vistula*. It then became indisputably patent that we were being watched by the officers of that vessel. Abruptly their fire slackened and died, leaving an aching void of silence where, a minute gone, the world had been echoing with the drumming of the quick-fire guns. Sevrance, with our glasses, declared that they had observed the firing of the torpedo, that agitation was plainly visible among the crew of the destroyer. I could not see, for he clung to the binoculars desperately, and vouchsafed me but a few almost unintelligible monosyllables.

You may guess that we waited with strained expectancy. Minutes may have passed—it's hard to say. You would not have caught a sound aboard the *Clymene*, barring the panting of the engines; not a man spoke.

It was only a question of time, we thought, ere would come the total demolition of the *Vistula*. That vessel had been estimated as well within range; the Whitehead had less than two-thirds of a mile to go—and that at a speed of thirty-one knots an hour! Only a matter of fleeting seconds. . . .

Nothing happened. Those seconds sped, and still the *Vistula* held on in undeterred pursuit. Reluctantly

we were compelled to relinquish hope, to admit that an error had been made, perhaps; that the Whitehead had proven defective; that any one of a thousand-and-one circumstances had worked against the true flight of the "death fish"—as Sevrance nicknamed it.

To prove the truth of this conclusion, the *Vistula* reopened fire. And now her aim was somewhat improved; missiles shrieked across our decks. I saw a man doubled up, as if some one had suddenly struck him a violent blow in the pit of the stomach. He was standing near the starboard rail; the force of the blow tore him in twain and swept him overboard. He died unwept—we had stern business to our hands.

Grimly, with determination mastering their wrath, the men labored with the after-tube, reloading it with a torpedo, making all things ready for Garvin's word. He—invaluable and undaunted man: God rest his soul!—frowned over the directing machine, taking full need of time to insure an accurate aim.

In a flash, a thought struck Sevrance. He wheeled about and shouted to one of the crew to hoist the Union Jack above the Russian ensign.

"We'll fight under our own flag—and die under it, if need be!" he declared. "We'll give these Dutchmen the hell they seek, if we can—but we'll unmask to do it!"

There was no response—we were too intent upon the progress of the duel. For as a duel it has always figured to me in retrospect.

Steadily we forged on, under forced draught, the labors of our mighty engines shaking the frail *Clymene* until one fancied that she would disintegrate in another instant.

Yet, though we fled at the top of our speed, it was evident that the *Vistula* was losing no ground. She held on unwaveringly, a white plume of water under her bows. If anything, she was gaining.

Again I saw Garvin raise his hand in mute command, and again there followed the throaty cough as the Whitehead was launched. A second time we hung upon the flying instants that sped between its immersion and the explosion that should come—but did not.

And the *Vistula* was gaining! Strain as the *Clymene* might, her engines, high power though they were, could not enable her to outfoot the pursuing destroyer.

That fact became self-evident; and my heart sank with the recognition of it. But undaunted, the men were busying themselves with the tube again: there was that one crumb of comfort for us—the supply of Whiteheads and ammunition was practically inexhaustible. Long before it could run out, this strange conflict would have passed into history, the *Vistula* or the *Clymene*, or both, be at the bottom of the sea.

It is not so hard to face death with weapons in one's hands. To be able to fight for life—that, at least, is something.

I had proof of this in the spirit of our men. While the torpedo-tube crew worked over the third discharge, I was well-nigh shaken off my feet; a tremendous crash near by sounded in my ears like a trump of doom, echoed and reëchoed continuously.

The crew of the after twelve-pounder had broken bounds. Acting upon their own initiative, they had opened fire; and now, for many minutes—or so it seemed—the ship was shaken every five seconds or so by

the heavy report; and the mouth of the gun vomited an apparently endless torrent of flame.

What effect their fire had will never be known. It was rapidly growing dark, though still a little twilight lingered—I recall thinking that curious day was lagging to witness the end of the combat. And the fog was closing in irregularly about us. Now and again the *Vistula* vanished—though you may be sure her well-nigh continuous fusillade left us in no doubt of her whereabouts. As for the *Asp* she still labored on, with bulldog purposefulness, far in the rear.

We were suffering. The Germans had found a fairly accurate range. The rain of their projectiles swept our decks periodically, causing more or less damage. Shortly after the beginning of our return fire, I counted two dead and three wounded on our decks. Men fell about me from time to time—one scarce noticed them after a while.

Almost immediately, the *Clymene* was staggered by a powerful blow—so forcible, as though delivered by some huge and irresistible battering-ram—as to throw men from their feet. I myself fell sprawling upon the corpse of a Norwegian.

There was a grinding and crashing noise like the blasting of rock by dynamite. A loud, clear, even, musical, and metallic clank sounded, bell-like, through the vessel. She seemed to halt, plunged forward, limping like a cripple, and came to a full stop.

A cloud of steam burst from the engine-room companion way, thick and stinking, rendering invisible the whole of the forward deck. From it I could see, as in a glass darkly, dim shapes of men staggering up from

the hatchway and throwing themselves upon the deck, out of reach of the scalding vapor, screaming.

Garvin rose behind me, shrieking with rage. "By God!" he screeched, menacing high Heaven with a blasphemous fist, "they've spoiled my aim!" He turned toward me with ludicrous and impotent exasperation. "I'd 'a' had her that time, sure!" he roared.

The third torpedo, it seemed, had been launched just at the wrong moment.

But the consciousness of our fatal catastrophe drowned every other consideration. A shell had penetrated the engine room and put a quietus to our sole hope of escape. The engines were ruined, the *Clymene* lay helpless, the carcass of a gallant ship, inert upon the face of the deeps—with the sharks plunging onward to their feast.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST SHOT

I LAY upon the deck, beside the lifeless Norwegian —weeping, I think. It required no second sight to understand what had befallen us—how utterly hopeless was our case. There was now naught for it, I considered, save surrender to whatever mercy we might hope to obtain at the hands of the Germans.

For the moment there was comparative quiet. The disaster had silenced the twelve-pounder; its crew turned away aghast, looking now to their superiors for direction and encouragement. The density of the humid atmosphere had pressed down the sulphurous smoke of the guns, and it lay above me as a blinding, reeking, suffocating pall.

Subconsciously I became aware that the firing of the *Vistula* seemed to have redoubled in violence. I wondered that they should be so heartless, should show us such slight pity in our extremity. Surely they could not suppose that we contemplated any further resistance! Yet I had reason to bear in mind the cold and heartless and unrelenting rage of the Teuton crossed, both as man and nation. The thought came to me that we had little to hope for from them, even should we at once cry for quarter.

From some distance to port—and at times it sounded

as though from astern—came a ceaseless racket of firing. I wondered that the *Vistula* should waste her ammunition so freely upon such small and feeble game. And, wondering, I came to my senses—such as they were—staggered up and out of the smoke cloud.

Almost at once I stumbled into Sevrance, who clapped a hand upon my shoulder with a fervent "Thank God, you're safe, old man!"

"But the others?" I asked.

He shook his head sorrowfully. "It's a bad business!" he said. "Bad—bad! The deck's a shambles, Gordon. They've shot us to bits—the infamous cowards! I doubt if we've half our men alive or able-bodied. The engine room's blown to smithereens. Everybody below was all but boiled alive——"

"Callahan?" I interrupted anxiously.

Sevrance bowed his head; he was hatless.

"He's—still down there—beyond rescue or aid," he said brokenly. "They tell me he was struck dead by the same shell."

"It's good to know that it wasn't the steam——"

"Don't!" Sevrance pleaded.

I held silence for a space; then: "What to do now?"

"What can we? We're on the knees of the gods."

"Well—we can surrender and take our medicine," I suggested.

"Don't be an ass, Gordon. We've got to fight it out or adopt the Japanese plan."

"Why, what do you——"

"Hara-kiri!" Sevrance smiled. "You don't seem to understand. Here's a German destroyer, the *Vistula*, sailing under false colors and wantonly attacking a ves-

sel flying the colors of a friendly power!" He caught at his breath. "Heaven alone knows how Holzborn—that fiend!—compassed this business!" he cried. "But the *Vistula* is in for it. D'ye suppose she can afford to let one witness live to tell the tale? Think what this story would mean—not only for Germany, but for the ship's officers themselves. How they think to keep it quiet, Heaven alone knows, but the fact remains that this business has got to be hushed up at whatever cost of blood and ships. Our turn will come after she's through with the *Asp* out there. The *Asp's* the deuce of a damaging witness—what you might call an unforeseen contingency, Gordon; something that the German murderers hadn't counted upon—don't you see? So they're trying to silence her by main strength and weight of ordnance."

"You don't mean that?"

"I would it were not true."

"Then they're not firing on *us*?"

He smiled bitterly. "What need? We are—*out*. They can afford to take their time before polishing *us* off. But the *Asp* has got to be attended to right away." He moved over to the rail, straining his eyes against the blinding fog.

"Nothing to see," he commented, "but from the sound of it, they're at it hammer and tongs, my boy! May Providence be with the British!"

As I stumbled toward him, Garvin reeled out of the mist and joined us. He was pale as a sheet, save where blood had spattered his head and torso—for he was stripped to the waist. His lips, I remember, were uncannily blue, his eyes staring, his features working as

convulsively as his broad and hairy chest that rose and fell spasmodically. Perspiration ran from him in streams.

"Three gun crews left, sir," he reported. "I've got 'em together, sir, and ready to work the two twelve-pounders and the after-tube. I——"

Sevrance shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, is it worth while?"

"Give me another chance at 'em, sir," Garvin pleaded. "They say the third time's luck. I'd 'a' blown them to perdition, sir, that last time if that infernal shell hadn't torn through to the engines. I want only one more chance at the tube, and then, if that's no go, I'll give it up, but——"

"Ah, what difference? Have it your own way. I'm only wishing that we could return a part of what they've given us, Garvin—and it seems to me that we could work the most damage with the guns."

"Thank you, sir. If I don't strike with the first torpedo, then I give it up and take to the six-pounders. At least, we can help the *Asp* out a bit."

"If they are not out of range," Sevrance reminded. "We can't move, you know."

"But we can sting a bit—if they're in range, as you say, sir."

He seemed struck with an idea, and, turning, instantly vanished.

A whiff of cold air, heavy with moisture, blew in my face. I leaped to the rail, and, as I had hoped, synchronously the fitful breeze rent apart the veils of fog.

It was now all but night; yet a white light hovered in the mists that hung about us in huge, translucent

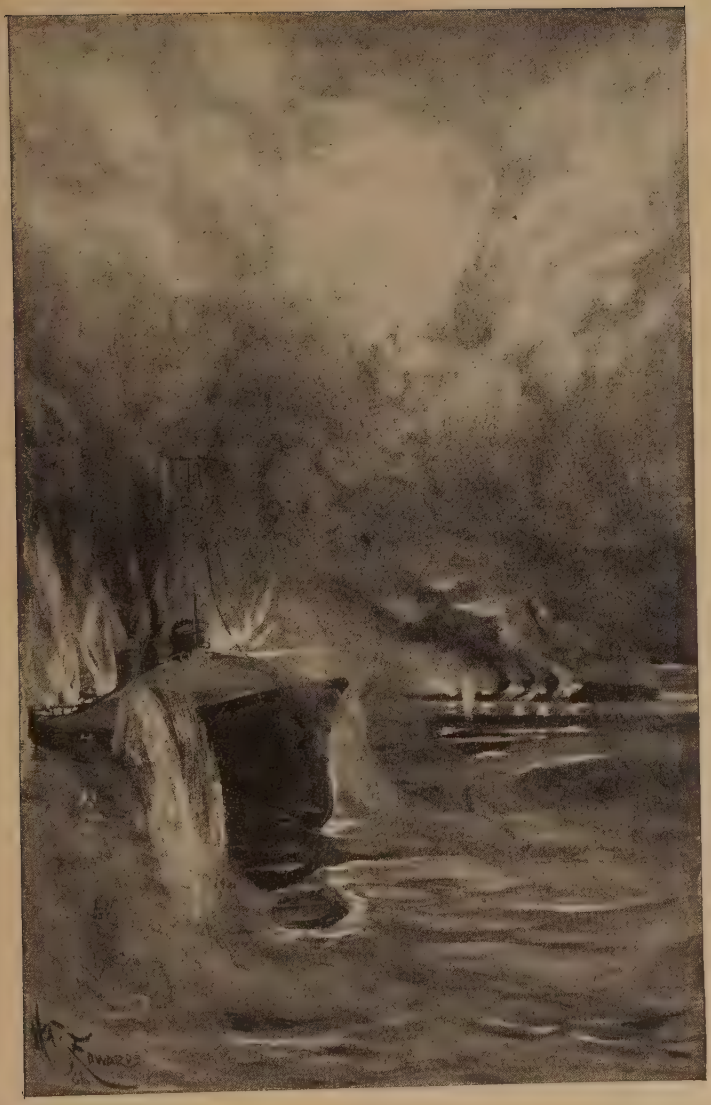
sheets, swaying slightly, traversing the heaving, sable seas slowly, with imperceptible progress, like gigantic and weary wraiths. They produced an effect whose counterpart I had never before imagined—something almost theatrical, as a set scene on a stage, inclosing that little space of water, perhaps two square miles in extent, wherein this deadly combat was being waged.

The *Myosotis* was not in sight; only the *Asp*, the *Vistula*, and the *Clymene* occupied the stage.

The two destroyers rode somewhat astern, approximately half a mile to port, with possibly a like distance between them. Both were wrapped with smoke as with shrouds, through which little, spiteful tongues of flame spat without intermission. The thunder of their quick- and rapid-firing twelve-pounders was like the long roll beaten upon some monster drumhead, while the racket of the three- and six-pounders, a shrill, chattering undertone, like a regiment of snare drums in full blare. A horrid tumult of warlike sound, and one to stir the blood, it was that drifted down to us with the penetrating reek of burnt smokeless powder.

Of neither could we see overmuch; although the more distant, the *Asp* was the more distinctly visible; and from a leaping and dying glare of light amidships on her decks, I fancied her afire. The *Vistula* was sheering gradually away, either in order to continue the engagement at a more respectful distance, or to close in upon us and administer a *coup de grâce* with less annoyance from the withering English rifle practice.

But the *Asp* was pressing on bulldoggedly, with the avid British appetite for hand grips. And so they bore down upon the *Clymene* steadily, at quarter speed,



"A horrid tumult of warlike sound."

growling and spitting for all the world like embattled cats—absurd as the simile may seem.

Then, without warning, out of the west a furious shower swept hissing, and for a little while its shining battalions of lances hid the combatants from us as with a curtain.

The rain pelted on and over the *Clymene*, sluicing her decks with a swirling torrent, and so out to the east. We were scarcely conscious of its passage; weary, sodden to the skin, a prey to terrors no less fantastic than this weird sea fight itself, we forgot ourselves and our painful fatigue and hung breathless upon the issue of the battle.

I fancied—how truly I was not to know for many long days—that the *Asp* was getting the worst of it; and that impression seemed to communicate itself simultaneously to every Englishman and English-speaking man in the crew. Despite that we had in the *Asp* a foe scarcely less to be feared than the German destroyer, our sympathies went out to the men of our own blood and race. . . .

I heard an oath behind me, followed by a sharp cry of command. It was Garvin's voice. Instinctively I stepped back from the rail, dragging Sevrance with me. The next moment the twelve-pounder belched fire by our sides, its flaming breath seared our cheeks, its detonation all but deafened us.

Garvin had lost control of himself; his madness infected the remainder of the crew; the men of the forward twelve-pounder set to work like demons. An incessant stream of projectiles belched from the muzzles of the two guns.

The effect of this diversion was at once apparent; the Germans awoke to the fact that, though incapable of flight, the *Clymene* had not lost its sting, was still a factor in the engagement. I saw a huge hole appear battered by our guns in the thin flanks of the German destroyer, just above the water line. She slewed about, as if fairly hammered from her course by the weight of those repeated blows.

And at once a return fire was instituted, with consequences awful to us. At that short range they could hardly miss. The forward twelve-pounder was silenced in a trice—fairly blown out of the deck—and half its crew mangled beyond recognition. Our remaining boat was shot to splinters. The after smokestack crumbled in upon itself like a tin funnel struck by a brick; the bridge was reduced to a tangle of twisted iron rods, the binnacle and wheel mysteriously vanishing—none could say how or whither.

On the after deck, the crew of the torpedo tube were struggling madly with an obstinate Whitehead; somehow, it seemed to stick in the tube, nor were they for many minutes able to budge it. Garvin raged like a lunatic. They wrestled with it like so many imps fresh sprung from Inferno. Two were killed simultaneously and by the same shot. Sevrance and I sprang to fill their places, lending our awkwardness to the baffling task.

A gradual slanting of the deck told us—though we scarce noticed it, nor cared—that the *Clymene* had been struck below the water line and was slowly filling, sinking by the head. I heard Sevrance muttering some prayer about water-tight compartments as he struggled

with the refractory torpedo. But no one else commented; we bent our sole endeavors, one and all, to the task of revenging ourselves and our countrymen upon the heads of the Germans.

And still the Whitehead stuck; the thing obstinately refused to yield to the utmost of our striving; we might neither withdraw it nor yet ram it into place.

A solid shot smashed the after twelve-pounder into flinders. Those remaining of its crew followed the example set by the men who had served the forward heavy rapid-fire gun and sprang to the six-pounders. The staccato chattering of these was like the patter of heavy hail upon a tin roof, sharp and loud against the background of infernal din.

But of these, one was almost immediately put out of action; its brother talked on for a little space, then, in its turn, became mute.

We found ourselves fighting that torpedo as though it, in itself, tangibly represented our foes aboard the *Vistula*. My memory of it is like a nightmare—a never-ending, heartbreaking struggle with the immovable—demoniac, gigantic laborings without reason or effect.

Abruptly the thing gave way, sliding smoothly into the tube as though such had been its ultimate purpose and intent from the beginning. We yelped feebly at it and leaped aside. Somebody standing immediately in front of me was suddenly crushed into a shapeless mass.

A shower of red liquid drenched me; it seemed as nothing—an inconsiderable detail. I wiped the blood from my eyes and brows with the back of a hand and turned to view the deck.

It was almost tenantless, save for the huddled heaps

of soiled and wet clothing that had been men. I saw one or two stir feebly. Another raised himself upon his hands and dragged himself with intolerable effort and agony—his lower limbs paralyzed—over to the scuppers, that still swam with rain water, where he fell upon his breast and drank greedily. A thin film of crimson seemed to cover the slanting deck.

Something struck the ship an irresistible blow near the bows. She gave to it, crying out in every joint like a tortured animal. Garvin cursed his luck, knelt again, and again adjusted the torpedo director.

The *Vistula*—I turned—loomed like a hell ship, fairly enwrapped with leaping fire. So near was she now that I could see her men scrambling about the deck, black silhouettes appearing and disappearing against the incessant flashes like shadows in a shadow show.

She, too, had suffered. I saw that two of her four funnels were gone, the hole in her gray flanks gaping larger; she reeled like a drunkard.

It became apparent that the *Asp*—possibly through some accident to her machinery—had been left behind. I observed that she lay fully a mile to port. The thought came to me that perhaps she had drawn off with the intention of torpedoing the German.

However this was will never be known. The secret of that conflict until this moment lies smothered with secrecy and red tape in the Admiralty offices; the English side of it will never be told—nor the German, for that matter.

Faintly, as if from a distance, I heard the dry, hacking bark of the Whitehead tube at my side. Garvin had given the word. I fancied that the torpedo took the

water like a living thing animated with the essence of our spirit of merciless hatred, eager and bloodthirsty. We all—what number there were left of us—clustered at the rail, gasping with hope.

The seconds dragged, seemingly interminable. Was this, too, a "fluke"? My heart sank. I heard a furious screaming behind me, and, half turning, beheld the apparition of a madman, rushing headlong down the slippery decks, leaping, jumping, sliding, falling.

His face fairly blazed with the ghastly pallor of panic fear; his eyes bulged like door knobs; his mouth worked spasmodically, slavering. Shrieking, he sped past us, leaped to the rail, joined his hands as though in prayer, and dived. Oddly enough, in that fleeting instant I found time to recognize him, to recall his distorted features as those of the man Pike.

Abruptly a sheet of livid flame rose, flaring from the *Vistula* to the zenith. A crashing as of a thousand thunderbolts shook the firmament; a geyser of foaming water, spreading out fanwise at its top, rose to an incredible height; in it, the contorted figures of men were visible instantaneously. The destroyer seemed to be lifted bodily out of the sea, to remain poised for an appreciable moment, to split asunder in halves, her masts and portions of her deck fittings rocketing skyward.

The light died at once and without a flicker. Intense darkness reigned over the waters, and with a start I recognized that it was now night—night, black and impenetrable.

There followed a series of heavy splashes: the shattered *Vistula* returned piecemeal unto its element. We listened, absorbed, carried away by the tremendousness

of this thing which we had brought to pass. The *Clymene* lurched and rolled beneath us, with the sickening motion of a water-logged craft in a storm-tossed sea. . . .

And, in a breath, I was fathoms deep in icy, inky waters, drawn downward by the maelstrom of the sinking ship as by a strong hand.

I realized the fact but barely. Already my lungs were partly filled with water. I have a faint recollection of struggling a little, without hope, of beating against the water purposelessly with hands as little potent as an infant's, of a sensation of suffocation, as of a man compressed between iron walls—all merging vaguely into a careless lethargy.

And it was night.

CHAPTER XXII

AN UNRAVELING

I CHOKED and strangled, sputtering. Liquid fire seemed to be calcining my mouth and throat, and I gagged convulsively, endeavoring to emit it; but powerful hands held me down as with a great weight, and I felt the intolerable heat burning my throat.

Gradually a faint warmth diffused itself through my person, even to my frozen extremities: a process attended by intense suffering. Without consciousness or comprehension of how I had been brought to such a pass or where I lay, yet by some strange subliminal action I figuratively stood aside and noted the process of my recovery.

My feet and legs, hands and arms felt as though pricked by a million white-hot needles; my heart labored mightily, aching as though it threatened to burst; a terrific ringing, as of an infinite concourse of church bells, sounded in my ears; my head swam and—ached; my lungs moved unwillingly, feeling as though they had been pressed flat—as though my breastbone lay against my spinal column; my eyes were like spheres of molten metal. I have no words adequately to express what torture I underwent.

I was being brought back to life. After many ages of this agony I understood that, knew that the pricking,

tingling, scorching sensation that pervaded my entire frame, running through all my veins, was the sting of returning life—life that once had seemed so priceless, that now seemed so worthless, not even worth the pain of resurrection.

For it amounted to that.

Again liquor was forced between my teeth; a great, resonant sound vibrated through me—I moaned and shook my head in enfeebled protest. Why could they not let me die? My eyes opened mechanically.

I caught a transient glimpse of an unearthly scene, lit by a dazzling glare of light.

Against a dense background of unbelievable blackness, a number of figures of men stood out as sharply as so many statues exhibited against a curtain of black velvet. Far, far above their heads a tiny light glimmered, swinging erratically. It held my gaze for a moment, until a clearer consciousness returned to me, when again I looked about.

My first definite recognition was of Von Holzborn. It seemed that the dead glare of his lusterless eyes was the first impression I received upon recovering—partially—my consciousness.

I seemed drawn by them, quite fascinated, and stared back, look for look, but half aware and wholly indifferent to that habitual, intolerant sneer that curled in the lines about his full, cruel lips.

He stood squarely facing me, leaning a bit forward, hands clasped behind his back, a long, frogged overcoat falling in straight folds from his broad shoulders to his knees. Behind him glowed the lighted window of a deckhouse; his shadow fell athwart me, cold and black.

The profound, brooding, enigmatic regard that he bent upon me set my poor, bewildered wits awhirl. A violent storm of rage seethed within me, for all that I lay there helpless, inert, flaccid—limp as a jellyfish —no more able to move than to fly. Yet I longed consumedly to get at him, hungering for his life, torn by a maddening desire to rise and take him in my two hands and savagely to rend him limb from limb.

And the greatness of my rage sapped every other faculty. I felt myself sinking, slipping away from sentience, sliding back into a darkness as cold and forbidding as the shadow of him who towered above me—whose shadow, I thought, forever was to fall athwart my life and destiny.

My last thought was of him ere I lapsed into the long sleep that held me dreamless for many, many hours.

. . . . . .

I awoke confused, conscious of stiffness and a cramped feeling in my limbs. It was barely daylight; above my head a faint glimmer filtered through the bulls-eye of a porthole—but whether the twilight of morning or of evening I could not say.

Alone and unattended, I lay in the single berth of a small stateroom; there was nothing within its four walls to give me a clew to the identity of the ship, yet I had slight difficulty in surmising the truth—that I was aboard the *Myosotis*, having been picked up by one of the yacht's boats, half-drowned and clinging to a bit of the *Clymene's* wreckage.

For a long while I lay there without moving, striving to piece together the incoherent fragments of my memory of the past day's events, which rose to the

surface of my consciousness as driftwood rises to the surface of a river.

Bit by bit it came back to me. The continuous story of that incredible day played itself over again before my mental vision. In retrospect it seemed outrageous and improbable; and, from the languor that possessed me, and the feeling of weakness, together with a certain and quite indefinable sensation of giddy light-headedness, I was more than half inclined to believe myself the victim of some monstrous hallucination, born of the febrile wanderings of a delirious mind. I half believed that I had lain ill for many days—out of my head and straying afar.

Yet—if that were so, how came I aboard the *Myosotis?* And why was my head bound with bandages that were stiff and caked with blood? I retained no recollection of the event, but it appeared that I had been wounded—how severely I could not tell.

After some time I lifted up my voice and called—and the strength of my accents contrasted with my physical sensations, which I may only describe as making me feel as though emaciated both bodily and mentally, was a surprise to me.

But I received no answer.

I could hear the chug-chug-chug of the engines in the yacht's hold, and the smack and hiss of the waters outside the porthole. Overhead, from time to time, would come the clatter of hurrying feet; and once I heard a long-drawn howl of command, hoarse and deep-throated, as one of the ship's officers—most likely the boatswain—stirred the seamen to activity.

In time there came from the apartment without the

stateroom, the clanging of a chime—either six or eight in the evening, I estimated, since now the light was dying and my room almost in total darkness.

I had noticed above my head an electric-light bulb. With some considerable effort I reached up and turned the key. Radiance flooded the room and enabled me to discover, presently, a push button in the wall at the head of the berth.

This I pressed, becoming aware that I was both hungry and thirsty. Far away, very thin and distant, I could hear the clamor of the bell; it shrilled and died, responsive to the pressure of my fingers on the button, but without result.

Again and again I tried, to no better effect. A dull rage smoldered within me; surely it was enough that I had been used so hardly; it seemed a refinement of cruelty so to leave me to perish, tortured by hunger and thirst!

The stewards, I thought, must have been ordered to disregard my summons. In the end I conceived that I must look to myself and myself alone for aid and comfort. With a groan of weakness I rolled over and, after a struggle, managed to sit up on the edge of the berth.

My clothing, dried and pressed, was swaying from a convenient hook. By degrees I managed to dislodge it without rising to do so, and—I can scarcely imagine how—thrust my legs into my trousers, dragged a shirt over my head, and got a coat upon my shoulders.

My own shoes were missing, but I found a pair of deck shoes, much too large, under the berth. With these I made shift to leave the stateroom.

By good chance, the door was not secured. I opened it and stepped out into the darkness of the yacht's main saloon. A number of chairs, lounges, and tables obstructed my way, yet I had a fairly good idea of where the electric switch should be; and, finally finding it, lighted up the saloon.

It was quite deserted and in great disorder—something which, however, did not concern me greatly. What did prove of surpassing interest was a buffet against the forward partition, whereon stood a bottle, open.

I staggered to it and discovered it to be a half-emptied magnum of champagne. A plate of crackers stood near by. I filled a tumbler with the generous fluid and downed it at a draught; it ran like fire in my veins. Munching the hard crackers, I finished the bottle, conscious of such an immediate renewal of strength that I promptly searched for, found, and opened a second bottle—a pint, this time. In ten minutes or so, during all of which time not a soul had entered the cabin, I had succeeded in swallowing enough fictitious strength to make me feel like a new man—a strong man, self-dependable, fit to cope with any emergency.

Yet—what was I to do now?

I made small doubt but that the *Myosotis* was flying northward, or toward the Baltic, to escape the inevitable pursuit which would be instituted by the authorities when the *Asp* had returned to port—providing that the English destroyer had been able to win so far; a contingency wherein I was not placing much belief, since I could not understand why, if seaworthy and able to take care of herself, the *Asp* had not put out boats to pick up survivors of the two wrecks. If she had done

so, I reasoned, Von Holzborn would have had too sincere a care for his own skin to have lingered in the vicinity.

But it was plain that—for what reason Heaven alone could say!—he had ordered the boats out from the *Myosotis*, had rescued the man who, most of any living, he had cause to fear as his most deadly and determined enemy.

But—the thought struck me with chill horror and dismay—had any been rescued save myself? What of Sevrance? Garvin? The others?

Sevrance lost?

I sank into a chair by the table, knitting my fingers in an effort to control my thoughts, aware that the wine had found the way to my head, that now I was not mentally clear.

But—Sevrance lost! I bowed my head and felt the tears start to my eyes. Ah, loyal and perfect gentleman! I mourned you as more than brother—you, my one true friend; whether living or dead, at that moment I did not know, but the loss of you was like the lopping off of my right hand.

Abruptly I started to my feet, possessed by the idea that I must go on deck, search out Von Holzborn or De Netze, find for myself the truth concerning the man I loved with a love passing that of women.

A lurch of the yacht almost threw me to the floor. I grasped the table to steady myself; and—at that moment a door opened on the side of the saloon opposite the room wherein I had rested and a woman came out.

At the sight of me she stopped with a little cry, holding herself as rigid and still as though turned to

stone. A glad light flamed in her eyes, then flickered and died; her color faded; she became of a deathly pallor, and there was terror, suddenly, in her eyes where there had been joy.

"Gordon!" she breathed.

I had started toward her, with arms outstretched; and so, I stopped wordless and amazed.

Still she seemed to fear me. She took a faltering step backward, her hands clasped upon her bosom, her lips moving without sound. . . . Her beauty struck me anew, with tremendous force; it was unearthly, incomprehensible, marvelous.

"Sweetheart, sweetheart!" I pleaded. "Don't"—my voice broke—"don't you know me—Gordon?"

"Gordon!" she cried again incredulously.

And then, before I realized it, she had come to me, and lay in my arms, her dear head upon my shoulder, her pallid cheeks to mine, her tremulous scarlet lips—"Dearest, oh, my dearest!" she whispered. "I did not know, I did not know!"

And, after a little time, "They did not tell me—they did not let me know," she answered my question. "All the evening they kept me locked in my stateroom, with only Mrs. Morchester for company. I knew nothing of what went on, for they had hung a piece of canvas over the porthole, and we could not see. Only I could hear the thunder of the guns, and guessed—no, *knew* that you were in peril, oh, my heart! Tell me!" she begged piteously.

Haltingly—for at such times no man can speak connectedly—I outlined the story, while she shuddered and sobbed in my arms and held me all the closer to

her, for that I had ventured so near the lip of the unknown for her dear sake.

Which was reward far greater than I deserved, God knows!

"I might have known," she blamed herself; "I might have known! Ah, had I but dared to warn you! Yet I did not dream that he"—she used the pronoun with loathing, since it stood for Holzborn—"would dare to such lengths."

"But why did you not tell me in the beginning?" I asked. "Why did you let me blunder on in darkness?"

"But I was afraid!" she protested. "I feared—ah, but you should know how I feared!"

"Feared what? Von Holz——"

"Hush!" She put her fingers to my lips. "No, I did not fear him," she said, "but for you. He pledged me his word, dear heart, that, should I permit my love for you to stand between him and our marriage, he would have you killed—assassinated. And I knew him capable! He stopped at nothing, nothing, to attain his ends! From the very day that I promised to marry him——"

"Why?"

"Because I was weary, dearest, weary with longing and waiting for you to come—and you would not. I was—I am so sorry!—too proud to tell you to come, and *he*—he asked me, and I liked him at first—until he began to threaten me. He—he had some papers—I don't know how to say it——"

"Don't say any more, dearest," I comforted her. "I know what to believe."

"But you must, you *must* not misunderstand, Gor-

don. It was something about Sir Henry—something foolish that he had done in India, in the army. It would have caused a terrible scandal if it had been published—and *he* said that he would publish them unless I gave him money——"

"My own dearest!" I soothed her.

"And then you came," she went on, "and there was this horrible affair with Monsieur de Netze. He—Captain von Holzborn—was in some way connected with the plot and he held the papers over my head as a threat to compel me to lend him the yacht, and made me come with him in order that, he said, I might not talk too much. I *so* wanted to tell you! You remember that day you were to call—and I telephoned?"

"I remember—" I began.

A heavy tread sounded on the companion way; some one was descending from the deck. Quickly I released my Heart's Desire, and as quickly she slipped away; but not swiftly enough to escape the notice of the intruder.

He paused on the lower step, his dark face immobile, his quick, furtive glance traveling from one to the other of us. At first his brows contracted, a clouded scowl gathered about them; then, as we waited his opening words in silence—my sweetheart shrinking, I with some trepidation, I must admit—his face cleared. But still without opening his lips he bent upon us that inscrutable, somber glance, penetrating and baffling.

The silence, prolonged, grew unendurable. I looked to my Heart's Desire, and saw that she was trembling violently; her hands at her sides—one gripping a table's edge—worked convulsively; and I saw, too, that she

was fast losing her self-control, tottering on the verge of hysteria.

Without regard, then, for the German, I moved over to her, passing an arm around her waist. "Courage, sweetheart!" I whispered, and could feel that the support was welcome and grateful to her. Nor did she attempt to move away, but clung to me, rather, as to a tower of strength. Which I was not.

When I looked again at Holzborn he was laughing noiselessly, showing his long, even, immaculately white teeth in a sardonic grin.

I steadied my voice, determined to force his hand. Unarmed, I stood at his mercy, even as, in the very fact of my presence there upon the *Myosotis*, my fate lay in the hollow of his hand.

"Well, sir?" I asked as calmly as I could.

He made no response beyond an audible chuckle; but, striding across to the center table of the saloon, he sat himself down heavily, without once removing his eyes from me. I believed him a bit afraid of me, and that belief was as the wine had been to me, affording me strength and self-reliance.

At length, without warning, he spoke—shortly, sharply, incisively.

"Sir," he said, with a little movement of his head—hardly could it have been termed a bow; a mere acknowledgment of my presence, it was—"sir, you have lost."

"Lost?" I echoed.

"Lost," he reiterated, with the accents of one stating a settled fact. "According to our contract, sir, by the terms of which you bound yourself to take

the *Clymene* to Libau—you have failed, and thereby lost."

A silence fell. I stared aghast. My dear one looked from one face to another inquiringly, not understanding; for be sure Holzborn had not let her into the secret of our compact.

For my own part, the rush and turmoil of battle and flight had driven that matter entirely from my mind; indeed, when I cast back, bewildered, into the past few days, beginning with my arrival in London and on through the pursuit to Saltacres, our weary vigil there, the arrival of the *Myosotis* and what followed, with the subsequent engaging of the crew for the *Clymene*—it all seemed very dim and far indeed in the past. I could scarce comprehend that the interval of time had been so slight—hardly twenty days since the first.

But I recollected rapidly—it all came back to me with a rush; and I had a particularly vivid memory of Holzborn, propped up with pillows in his bed at Saltacres, bickering with us over the details of the adventure which he was contriving to bring about our undoing.

"So," I said slowly; "so you were not wounded, *mein Herr*!"

"*Ach*, yes!" he granted amiably. "But—oh, slightly, mine enemy. Yet it was sufficient to enable me to hoodwink you—you, the virtuous, the wise, the self-complacent!" He laughed grimly. "I pride myself that I took you in very neatly—you and your fellow fool, Mr. Sevrance."

"Neatly indeed," I conceded, and "Liar!" I commented.

He flushed.

"Strong language, sir!" he said, but without much apparent resentment. "Yet I understand; you Anglo-Saxons are what you call hard losers. Eh, I have won! And you have lost. I had thought, sir"—and here he assumed a temper—"that you were a man of honor."

"You should be the best judge of such matters, my German friend."

"You lose, you see," he explained ponderously, "yet go back upon your bargain. It was agreed that if you lost you were to relinquish all claims to madam's hand, was it not, my welcher? Yet I find you with your arms about her, your lips to hers. Do you English call such conduct honorable?"

"At least," said I, "as much so as your conduct in this affair, Captain von Holzborn."

"All's fair in love and war," he interrupted with a sneer.

"You have made the aphorism an axiom," I retorted. "But the fault is mine, I admit; had I known you for what you are—liar, coward, blackmailer——"

"Stop!"

"The words sting, sir?" I asked with mock courtesy. "I—fancied they would."

He looked me over without reply, then, in a surly tone, addressed her ladyship.

"Madam," he said, "you will please be seated—unless you would be fatigued. You, sir, may please yourself."

He grunted and struck his knuckles sharply against a huge Chinese gong that decorated the center of the table.

CHAPTER XXIII

HER LADYSHIP

THE mellow tones vibrated like distant thunder. Ere they had sung into silence a white-jacketed steward appeared, bowing deferentially.

"You will go," the German instructed him, after a moment of deliberation, "and ask Captain Keen to here join us; also Dr. Chine. If Monsieur de Netze is in his stateroom, tell him that I would like to see him. Ask the second mate to release from the lazarette the men we picked up, and bring them here. I want also the man Grady."

The steward saluted and disappeared noiselessly.

"Grady!" I cried.

Von Holzborn turned to me. "Grady," he repeated. "Yes. You are surprised? Yet, what would you? It was necessary for me to get away from Saltacres without your being apprised of the fact. Your spy was in the way. We overpowered him, Fritz and I, and shipped him that same night, with ourselves."

"You were uncommonly considerate," I returned. "The wonder is that you did not knife him—in the back."

Again he colored darkly, but still he asserted his admirable control of self and held his wrath in check. He even commented upon the matter.

"I call your attention to the fact that I am treating you with great leniency, Mr. Traill," he said smoothly; "you would do well to avoid provoking me further. There are limits to all things—you verge dangerously near the insufferable. I have warned you."

"Your condescension shames me!" I laughed.

He nodded meaningly. "Your case will be attended to presently," he announced. "For the present I would counsel you to silence. You but prejudice your own case by your free tongue."

A hot reply rose to my lips, but my Heart's Desire stilled me with a pleading look. "Be not afraid," I whispered to her. "Now, go, dear."

She moved over to an armchair, as far removed from the German as the limits of the room would permit, and seated herself, facing him, chin in hand, elbow on knee, watching him steadily beneath her level brows. One small slipper tapped the deck nervously, impatiently, while we waited the advent of the others.

Somehow I had a premonition of the outcome of the business; a feeling as though I was about to stand trial, with my comrades and Grady, before a drumhead court-martial, for the high crime of standing in the light of Kurd von Holzborn.

What manner of sentence would be passed upon us—and especially upon me—I could hardly doubt. My sole speculation was concerning the shape in which death would be meted out unto me. Not for an instant did I conceive of life or liberty being accorded me; too well I knew the German's malignant nature by then.

It was but a moment ere the quick steps of Captain

Keen were to be heard. He entered briskly, nodded negligently to his ostensible employer, her ladyship, and briefly to me, favoring me thereafter with a cold and dispassionate consideration.

Von Holzborn silently motioned him to a chair. No words were passed on either hand. Chine entered next, raking the cabin with his quick, dark eyes. The state of affairs was evidently apparent to him at once. He bowed to me in not unfriendly fashion, shrugged his shoulders, and sat him down—also in obedience to Von Holzborn's mute invitation.

There followed, after an interval, a scuffle of feet across the deck, a confusion on the companion way, and immediately afterwards the appearance of a little party of men in all stages of dilapidation, both as regards clothing and physical condition.

They were a rough-looking crew that tumbled down the stairs, with three seamen of the *Myosotis* and the second mate, all armed, at their heels. Three had their forearms supported by loops—one wore splints; another limped painfully, and his hollow eyes spoke eloquently of the anguish exertion gave him; still another was one mass of bandages, reeking of iodoform, about his head —quite effectually masked; and the last—how my heart leaped at the recognition of his tall, spare figure!—was Sevrance himself.

I jumped forward to greet him, but the mate shouldered me roughly aside. "Stand back!" he growled—an evil-visaged scoundrel; and prodded me with the point of a revolver.

I gave in with a laugh. Sevrance caught my eye, his own beaming with joy to see me safe and practically

sound, and smiled wanly. His lips moved noiselessly, framing some communication which I failed to read. I shook my head despondently.

The six by Holzborn's direction were ranged against the after partition, an armed man of the crew at either end, vigilant, one judged, to repress any attempt at outbreak. The mate stationed himself to one side, obediently to a gesture from the German, and kept a wary eye upon me—as if I was to be feared! The excess of precaution moved me to derision.

I laughed in Holzborn's face when he glanced my way.

"I congratulate you on your regard for your safety," I told him. "It is, to be frank, quite justifiable. Were I not held in leash by that revolver which you are fingering in your coat pocket, Captain, I promise you that I would——"

"It is doubtful," he cut me short. "Be quiet."

Nevertheless, he wore a shamefaced air, half apologetic, and hastily took his hand from his pocket as he glanced toward her ladyship to determine whether or not she had caught my remark. The look he received in return would have withered any ordinary man.

But Von Holzborn was not ordinary; his conceit had toughened his hide beyond the penetrating power of human contempt—even a woman's. He lifted his shoulders slightly, smiled, and sat back in his chair, dead eyes ranging the line of the rescued with an expression —if any—of casual speculation.

A silence fell in the saloon; we awaited De Netze. A dry cough heralded his approach, and presently he ap-

peared, stepping softly down the port passageway—calm, collected, and smiling, as fragile of appearance as ever.

To her ladyship first he bowed, and deeply. His eyes next fell upon me, and he honored me with a look informed with wonder and compassion. Sevrance also he greeted, crossing the saloon to offer us each his hand and say a few words of regret at the ill-success of our venture, in which his own hopes had been so bound. I barely recall what he said; doubtless the phrases themselves were conventional enough; it was the meaning, the sincerity, with which they were delivered that convinced me of the Russian's honest sympathy.

He at least, I believe to this day, had no hand in the business of the *Vistula*. That had been Holzborn's private venture, his own fell design.

And it struck me at once, and, oddly enough, for the first time, that De Netze, too, had been tricked, duped, even as had Sevrance and myself. It afforded me a ray of hope in the darkness of my despair—if he knew the truth, I made little doubt but that he would hold himself our ally. And Heaven knew we needed an ally!

Abruptly Von Holzborn broke the constraint, speaking without rising, his head bent forward, his inscrutable gaze bent upon the hands which lay before him, clasped, upon the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, speaking with deliberation, "I have called you here to form what we may term a council of war." He paused, looking around from face to face of those whom he might consider of his party.

"We are, as you know, in peril of arrest, gentlemen.

It is a certainty that already the affair of yesterday evening has reached not alone the authorities, but also the public. The withdrawal of the English destroyer without delay means but one thing—that she has sought the nearest port, in immediate and pressing need of repairs. It is, then, a foregone conclusion that her officers and crew will lose no time in spreading the account of the battle between the *Clymene* and the Japanese destroyer."

I started slightly. Von Holzborn, as he spoke, was scrutinizing us keenly; fortunately, at the moment, he was not looking my way and did not remark my agitation. As for the others, they did not show any signs of noticing aught amiss with the drift of his remarks.

"We have, therefore," he continued ponderously, "chosen and judged it advisable to get to the Atlantic with the least possible delay. In fact, we are now off the Hebrides. Our ultimate destination remains a moot question. It has been suggested, and I admit that I, for one, favor the suggestion, that we make for the South Pacific, avoiding the usual course of ocean traffic. The *Myosotis*, as most of you know, is provisioned for a long cruise, and herself entirely a seaworthy craft. The project is one entirely feasible. Once in the South Pacific we can make for one of the Carolines, the Solomons, or the Ladrones—the field is large—and there lie in safety until this matter has blown over—passed into history. It might be advisable to change the name of the yacht; but that is a detail."

He paused. De Netze spoke.

"I would indorse that suggestion," he said, "with

an amendment—at some convenient point I can be landed, to make my way back to Russia. You may safely, I think, count upon *my* keeping silence."

He smiled. Von Holzborn nodded agreement to him. "There will be no objection raised, I am sure," he said. "But now a fresh complication has presented itself. Against my better judgment, but in deference to the wishes of Monsieur de Netze, I caused boats to be lowered, after the deplorable disaster of yesterday evening, and a search to be made for survivors—with the result you see."

With a wave of his hand he indicated the waiting line of those who were practically prisoners. "Incriminating witnesses, gentlemen," he asserted. "We must have a care in handling them. Two at least—Mr. Traill and Mr. Sevrance—are openly my enemies. I think we can count upon their continued hostility to whatever plan we settle upon. Am I right?"

"You are certainly right," I gave him answer without delay.

"To the end," agreed Sevrance with a short laugh.

"You see. Gentlemen—you, monsieur; you, captain; you, doctor—I appeal to you that such a state of affairs is intolerable."

"I might add," Sevrance broke in, "for your benefit, that I, personally, shall not rest until I see you in your grave, Captain."

"I am infinitely obliged," stated Von Holzborn; "the warning shall not go unregarded. Under these circumstances, no ship is large enough to hold you two and myself. The question presents itself: What to do with you?"

"If you'll permit me"—Sevrance began diffidently; the German nodded—"I make bold to suggest that your course is plain to you—to knife us while we sleep, Captain, would be an easy matter, and one quite to your taste."

"It shall be considered," agreed the German with ugly gravity. "And now, captain, what would you suggest?"

Keen smiled evilly. "There are certain islands in our proposed course," he insinuated, "where men might be marooned and not sight ship for years—if they lived."

"Thank you. You, doctor?"

"I bow to your superior genius, Captain von Holzborn."

The Prussian's brows gathered quickly, as quickly smoothed themselves; the gaze he turned from Chine was quite placid. "And you, Netze, *mon ami?*"

The Russian coughed behind his delicate fingers. "I do not see the necessity," he countered. "Messieurs Traill and Sevrance have been of great service to us, and might have been of greater had it not been for that Japanese destroyer——"

"De Netze," I cried—judging the time ripe—"that boat was no Japanese!"

Von Holzborn jumped to his feet. "Be quiet, you!" he snarled.

"She was——"

The German motioned to the mate. A hand was clapped over my lips; I mumbled my conclusion into it, staring into the eye of his revolver.

"German," I heard Sevrance conclude my words

on the instant: "The *Vistula*, Monsieur de Netze, inspired to this devilment——"

"Be silent!" Von Holzborn thundered. "If not, by God! I'll—" He produced his revolver with a flourish.

But a hint had been sufficient to the astute Russian secret agent. He rose suddenly, his face crimson, his white hands quivering.

"Holzborn," he cried sharply, "what truth is there in this?"

Von Holzborn hesitated, for once at a loss. I do not think that he had suspected our knowledge of the *Vistula's* identity; I believe that our words came to him as a total surprise. He stammered, seeking vainly for a loophole for escape. Were his perfidy to De Netze made known, then in truth was his camp divided against itself—and against him.

"No truth," he stuttered. "Upon my word, Netze, would you believe that *Schweinhund?*"

The Russian drew himself up stiffly, eyes blazing, lips white with rage. "If I believed for an instant—" he began; and stealthily his hand moved toward a pocket.

Von Holzborn rapped sharply on the table with his revolver.

"Believe or not," he cried wrathfully; "small odds to me, monsieur, but have you a care with that pistol!"

What followed is a blur of impressions. I can hardly set them down with accuracy; a number of things happened synchronously.

On my own part I had been watching my chance. Already I had decided that our fate was a thing already

settled in the Prussian's mind—that he waited only the opportunity to put us out of the way. And, as I saw the case, the sooner we were come to a settlement, the better for all concerned.

I think that the wine and my anger and fatigue had all combined to throw me somewhat off my mental balance. I think I must have gone a bit mad. Surely he must have been mad who harbored a plan as insane as was mine.

For some seconds I had been watching the mate narrowly. The altercation between De Netze and the Prussian had drawn his attention inevitably, even as I had hoped it would. For a single instant he allowed his eyes to wander from me.

For that instant I had been waiting. I improved it by striking up his arm—delivering a powerful blow with the side of my hand upon the muscles of his wrist. His grip upon his weapon relaxed, and it clattered upon the floor. Simultaneously I put a fist in his face and knocked him backward, stunning him.

Even as I did so, out of the tail of my eye I caught a flitting shadow between myself and De Netze. There was a quick cry of horror and the thud of a heavy blow.

The happening held us all spellbound for an instant. Tragedy had stalked unbidden from an unsuspected corner of the saloon. De Netze had been stabbed to the heart.

I saw him rise upon his toes, grasping at the empty air. Then he fell, like some inanimate thing, stiffly.

The sound of his fall roused us. I heard a cry of horror, high-keyed, an oath, a swift patter of feet.

He whose arm had aimed the blow to the Russian's heart was running for the companion way. As he turned, reeking knife in his hand, desperation writ large upon his features, crouching like a hunted thing, I saw his face.

He was Pike—"George Pike," agent of the Secret Chapter, as he now proved himself to be. I had not recognized him when he had entered, but now I knew him unmistakably.

He reached the foot of the steps in two jumps, stumbled, and went to his knees. As he scrambled to his feet a shot rang suddenly through the saloon. Pike swayed backward, lurched, and crumpled in upon himself—a limp bundle of flesh.

Von Holzborn had fired.

I saw the smoking gun in his hand, and caught the glint of brute rage in his eye that ranged us all. He seemed abruptly to comprehend what had occurred in the matter of the mate, and turned upon me.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "the ball's begun! So you, too, court death? Come, then, and find it!"

He menaced me with the revolver. I saw Sevrance crouched as if to spring at him across the floor, and myself felt my muscles coiling and trembling beneath my clothing.

"I'll kill you with my naked hands you cur!" I cried beside myself. "Armed or not, I'll——"

I sprang for him. Reason was gone from me entirely. Civilization had dropped from me as a cast garment. For the moment I was crazed with the blood lust of the primitive barbarian. If there be men who go

shirtless, these degenerate days, I have proven myself akin to them.

My prey lay before me; my fingers itched for the death clutch on his throat. Mad, indeed, I threw myself across the floor of the saloon.

He fired without hesitation. Something struck me a terrific blow in the chest. I felt myself brought up, as it were, in midspring. Again he fired.

In a maze I found myself upon the floor, the breath fairly driven from my body by that second staggering blow. Intuitively I knew myself wounded, and wounded nigh unto death. Yet the madness held me; I strove to raise myself, to regain my feet, again to court the issue with his pistol.

Sevrance I saw leaping across my prostrate body. In another instant he should have had Von Holzborn by the throat. But a third time a revolver spoke—and on the heels of that report came a sharp, short cry. Sevrance stopped short in his tracks, and stepped back with a little, wondering exclamation.

Faintness was enchaining my limbs, numbing my senses. I felt that but a few moments more of consciousness remained to me; desperately I strove to prolong them, that I might know the cause of this sudden hush. Sevrance stepped aside.

I saw Von Holzborn standing, but supported only by his shoulders against the partition behind the table. His arms were outstretched, his hands empty, his eyes closed; his fingers twitched furiously.

Still I did not comprehend what had happened, but only looked and marveled.

Abruptly the man seemed to come to life miracu-

lously. He opened his eyes, for a moment stood steadily erect. One hand went to his breast, above his heart, clutching there fiercely; and a jet of blood spurted between his fingers.

His iron features contorted themselves into a dreadful smile—proud, impenitent, evil. His glassy eyes—now more opaque than ever—rolled in their sockets from side to side, until they rested upon that person who had put this leaden period to his career. There they became fixed, with a glare of admiring yet sardonic intensity—fixed and ironic. The blood ebbed swiftly from his cheeks, his close-shaven beard showing blue through the skin's cold pallor.

He half turned, all but bowed. Twice his lips moved without producing sound. The third time he mouthed one word:

"*Madam!*"

I heard a crash, and saw that he had fallen to the table, face down; and there he lay, very still and quiet and harmless.

Straining still to hold to consciousness, I twisted my head upon my shoulders, until my gaze rested upon my Heart's Desire.

She was standing, her left hand clutching and tearing at the lace of her corsage. In the right, swinging at her side, a revolver dangled; and from its muzzle curled a shred of smoke.

I braced myself. "Julia!" I cried.

The word seemed to rouse her as from evil dreams. She swung toward me with a little, pitiful cry, and her arms went out, the revolver falling from her hands. Swiftly she came toward me, tottering.

"Gordon—Gordon!" I heard her cry. "It was for you, dear heart—for you alone!"

She paused, swaying, her eyes vacant, her face wiped as clean of expression, whether of joy or of anguish, as a slate with a sponge.

Sevrance caught her as she fainted.

POSTSCRIPT

Excerpt from a letter—Mr. Anthony Sevrance, Barrister, London, to the editor:

London, England, *Jan. 5, 190—.*

You may complain that the story is unfinished—this I anticipate. The truth of the matter is that Traill could not be persuaded to go beyond that last sentence in which he mentions that I caught her ladyship as she fell fainting in the saloon of the *Myosotis*. . . .

Nor could any word of mine move him from this determination. Let this, then, furnish the material for a footnote:

It was six months from the date of Von Holzborn's death, that the *Myosotis* sailed into the harbor of Châlle, on the island of Sru, in the South Pacific. To what particular group of the South Sea Islands Sru belongs, I shall not say. It is charted. The diligent may find it, if they are so curious.

In the meantime Traill had mended of his wounds; and Mrs. Traill—then Lady Herbert—had come successfully through an attack of fever of long duration. Dr. Chine here proved himself invaluable. When Lady Herbert convalesced, happily she was without memory of Von Holzborn's manner of meeting his death. She will never know, for Traill will never tell her, nor will Grady. As for myself, I would rather cut off my right hand than do so. And inasmuch as they will never leave Sru, she will live out her life in happy ignorance.

By the way, I've lost Grady. He married a native

girl, and has settled down in Sru—overseer to Traill's lands. Naturally he refused to come back to England.

I don't blame him. For my own part, I have returned to England only to wind up some business matters. I sail for America for a consultation with Traill's solicitors next month; from New York I shall take overland train to San Francisco—and thence steamer to Sru. The isles of the Southern Seas have put the " come thee " upon me. I could never live happy away from them. Nor could I live happy away from those two whom, most of all living beings, I love.

You may have guessed that in one crisis, at least, I figured not so badly. With Traill collapsed, Von Holzborn's two bullets in his body; with the Prussian clay, and De Netze's soul going over the Great Divide; with her ladyship all but inanimate in my arms, I took command. Grady happened in—having been delayed —just at that moment, and jumped to the situation like the ready man he is. Also I had Chine, who had never been well-disposed toward the conspirators. Keen, as you will have surmised, was but a cheap villain; a little show of authority cowed him in an instant. Thereafter we had things our own way. When the *Myosotis* came to Sru, we paid off the crew liberally and sold the yacht. . . .

Commending, then, the accompanying manuscript to your most tender mercies, I have the honor to be, my dear sir,

Faithfully yours,

ANTHONY SEVRANCE.

(1)

THE END